

ingl. f. I 100 k.



TARTU STATE UNIVERSITY

**READER IN ENGLISH AND
AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Tartu 1969

TARTU STATE UNIVERSITY
Chair of English

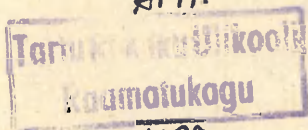
READER IN ENGLISH
AND AMERICAN
LITERATURE

Compiled by

H. Pulk

Tartu 1969

Arh.



1189

KUSTUTATUD

P R E F A C E

The present reader is meant either for the first- or second-year students of the English language department as material for independent work (home reading).

The texts have been selected from works by well-known British and American authors and have been provided with commentaries.

The compiler wishes to express her sincerest gratitude to O. Mutt, L. Hone, A. Kriit and E. Mauring for their kind assistance.

H. Pulk

C O N T E N T S

E. Hemingway	
Old Man at the Bridge	5
L. Hughes	
One Friday Morning	8
W.S. Maugham	
The Luncheon	22
W. Saroyan	
Laughter	28
H.H. Munro	
The Brogue	37
D.M. Lessing	
The Old Chief Mshlanga	45
K. Mansfield	
A Cup of Tea	62
O. Henry	
The Ransom of Red Chief	73
A. Maltz	
The Happiest Man on Earth	88
J.K. Jerome	
The Surprise of Mr. Milberry	103

OLD MAN AT THE BRIDGE

Ernest Hemingway

1898 - 1961

An old man with steel-rimmed spectacles and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road. There was a pontoon bridge across the river and carts, trucks, and men, women and children were crossing it. The mule-drawn carts staggered up the steep bank from the bridge with soldiers helping push against the spokes of the wheels. The trucks ground up and away heading out of it all and the peasants plodded along in the ankledeep dust. But the old man sat there without moving. He was too tired to go any farther.

It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.

"Where do you come from?" I asked him.

"From San Carlos"¹, he said, and smiled.

That was his native town and so it gave him pleasure to mention it and he smiled.

"I was taking care of animals", he explained.

"Oh", I said, not quite understanding.

"Yes", he said, "I stayed, you see, taking care of animals. I was the last one to leave the town of San Carlos".

He did not look like a shepherd nor a herdsman and I looked at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel-rimmed spectacles and said: "What animals were they?"

"Various animals", he said, and shook his head. "I had to leave them".

I was watching the bridge and the African-looking coun-

try of the Euro² Delta and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.

"What animals were they?" I asked.

"There were three animals altogether", he explained. "There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons".

"And you had to leave them?" I asked.

"Yes, because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery".

"And you have no family?" I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.

"No", he said, "only the animals I stated. The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others".

"What politics have you?" I asked.

"I am without politics", he said. "I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers and I think now I can go no further".

"This is not a good place to stop", I said. "If you can make it³, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa".

"I will wait a while", he said, "and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?"

"Towards Barcelona"⁴, I told him.

"I know no one in that direction", he said, "but thank you very much. Thank you again very much".

He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, then said, having to share his worry with someone, "the cat will be all right, I am sure. There is no need to be unquiet about the cat. But the others. Now what do you think about the others?"

"Why, they'll probably come through it all right".

"You think so?"

"Why not", I said, watching the far bank where now there were no carts.

"But what will they do under the artillery when I was told to leave because of the artillery?"

"Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" I asked.

"Yes".

"Then they'll fly".

"Yes, certainly they'll fly. But the others. It's better not to think about the others", he said.

"If you are rested I would go", I urged. "Get up and try to walk now".

"Thank you", he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.

"I was taking care of animals", he said dully, but no longer to me, "I was taking care of animals".

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the fascists were advancing toward the Ebro.

It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling⁵ so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.

Proper Names

San Carlos	/sən 'kɑ:lɒs/
Ebro	/'i:brou/
Barcelona	/bə:si'lounə/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... San Carlos - a Spanish town
2. ... the Ebro - a river in North-East Spain (927 kms long)
3. "If you can make it..." - If you can get so far
4. Barcelona - the biggest port and industrial centre in Spain.
5. ... ceiling (in aviation) - maximum altitude a given aeroplane can attain - (here: maximum altitude in particular weather conditions).

ONE FRIDAY MORNING

James Langston Hughes

1902

The news did not come directly to Nancy Lee, but it came in little indirections¹ that finally added themselves up to one tremendous fact: she had won the prize! But being a calm and quiet young lady, she did not say anything, although the whole high school² buzzed with rumors³, guesses, reportedly authentic announcements on the part of students who had no right to be making announcements at all - since no student really knew yet who had won this year's art scholarship.

But Nancy Lee's drawing was so good, her lines so sure, her colors so bright and harmonious, that certainly no other student in the senior art class at George Washington High⁴ was thought to have very much of a chance. Yet you never could tell. Last year nobody had expected Joe Williams to win the Artist Club scholarship with that funny modernistic water color he had done of the high-level bridge. In fact, it was hard to make out there was a bridge until you had looked at the picture a long time. Still, Joe Williams got the prize, was feted by the community's leading painters, club women, and society folks at a big banquet at the Park-Rose Hotel, and was now an award student⁵ at the Art School - the city's only art school.

Nancy Lee was a colored girl, a few years out of the South⁶. But seldom did her high-school classmates think of her as colored. She was smart, pretty and brown, and fitted in well with the life of the school. She stood high in scholarship⁷, played a swell game of basketball⁸, had taken part in the senior musical⁹ in a soft velvety voice, and had never seemed to intrude or stand out except in pleasant ways, so it was seldom even mentioned - her color.

Nancy Lee sometimes forgot she was colored herself. She liked her classmates and school. Particularly she liked her art teacher, Miss Dietrich, the tall red-haired woman who taught her to keep her brush strokes firm and her colors clean, who taught her law and order in doing things; and the beauty of working step by step until a job is done; a picture finished; a design created; or a block print¹⁰ carved out of nothing but an idea and a smooth square of linoleum, inked, proofs made, and finally put down on paper - clean, sharp, beautiful, individual, unlike any other in the world, thus making the paper have a meaning nobody else could give it except Nancy Lee. That was the wonderful thing about true creation. You made something nobody else on earth could make - but you.

Miss Dietrich was the kind of teacher who brought out the best in her students - but their own best, not anybody else's copied best. For anybody else's best, great though it might be, even Michelangelo's, wasn't enough to please Miss Dietrich dealing with the creative impulses of young men and women living in an American city in the Middle West¹¹, and being American.

Nancy Lee was proud of being American, a Negro American with blood out of Africa a long time ago, too many generations back to count. But her parents had taught her the beauties of Africa, its strength, its song, its mighty rivers, its early smelting of iron, its building of the pyramids, and its ancient and important civilizations. And Miss Dietrich had discovered for her the sharp and humorous lines of African sculpture, Benin, Congo, Makonde¹², Nancy Lee's father was a mail carrier; her mother a social worker in a city settlement house.¹³ Both parents had been to Negro colleges¹⁴ in the South. And her mother had gotten¹⁵ a further degree in social work from a Northern university. Her parents were, like most Americans, simple ordinary people who had worked hard and steadily for their education. Now they were trying to make it easier for Nancy Lee to

achieve learning than it had been for them. They would be very happy when they heard of the award to their daughter - yet Nancy did not tell them. To surprise them would be better. Besides, there had been a promise.

Casually, one day, Miss Dietrich asked Nancy Lee what color frame she thought would be best on her picture. That had been the first inkling.

"Blue", Nancy Lee said. Although the picture had been entered in the Artist Club contest a month ago, Nancy Lee did not hesitate in her choice of a color for the possible frame since she could still see her picture clearly in her mind's eye - for that picture waiting for the blue frame had come out of her soul, her own life, and had bloomed into miraculous being with Miss Dietrich's help. It was, she knew, the best water color she had painted in her four years as a high-school art student, and she was glad she had made something Miss Dietrich liked well enough to permit her to enter in the contest before she graduated.

It was not a modernistic picture in the sense that you had to look at it a long time to understand what it meant. It was just a simple scene in the city park on a spring day with the trees still leaflessly lacy against the sky, the new grass fresh and green, a flag on a tall pole in the center, children playing and an old Negro woman sitting on a bench with her head turned. A lot for one picture, to be sure, but it was not there in heavy and final detail like a calendar. Its charm was that everything was light and airy, happy like spring, with a lot of blue sky, paper-white clouds, and air showing through. You could tell that the old Negro woman was looking at the flag; and that the flag was proud in the spring breeze; and that the breeze helped to make the children's dresses billow as they played.

Miss Dietrich had taught Nancy Lee how to paint spring, people, and a breeze on what was only a plain

white piece of paper from the supply closet. But Miss Dietrich had not said make it like any other spring-people-breeze ever seen before. She let it remain Nancy Lee's own¹⁶. That is how the old Negro woman happened to be there looking at the flag - for in her mind the flag, the spring, and the woman formed a kind of triangle holding a dream Nancy Lee wanted to express. White stars on a blue field, spring, children, evergrowing life, and an old woman. Would the judges at the Artist Club like it?

One wet rainy April afternoon Miss O'Shay, the girls' vice-principal¹⁷, sent for Nancy Lee to stop by her office as school closed. Pupils without umbrellas or rain-coats were clustered in doorways hoping to make it home between showers¹⁸. Outside the skies were gray. Nancy Lee's thoughts were suddenly gray, too.

She did not think she had done anything wrong, yet that tight little knot came in her throat just the same as she approached Miss O'Shay's door. Perhaps the note in French she had written to Sallie half way across the study hall just for fun had never gotten to Sallie but into Miss O'Shay's hands instead. Or maybe she was failing in some subject and wouldn't be allowed to graduate. Chemistry! A pang went through the pit of her stomach.

She knocked on Miss O'Shay's door. That familiarly solid and competent voice said, "Come in."

Miss O'Shay had a way of making you feel welcome even if you come to be expelled.

"Sit down, Nancy Lee Johnson," said Miss O'Shay. "I have something to tell you." Nancy Lee sat down. "But I must ask you to promise not to tell anyone yet."

"I won't, Miss O'Shay," Nancy Lee said, wondering what on earth the principal had to say to her.

"You are about to graduate," Miss O'Shay said. "And we shall miss you. You have been an excellent student, Nancy, and you will not be without honors on the senior list¹⁹, as I am sure you know."

At that point there was a light knock on the door. Miss O'Shay called out, "Come in," and Miss Dietrich entered. "May I be part of this, too?" she asked, tall and smiling.

"Of course," Miss O'Shay said. "I was just telling Nancy Lee what we thought of her, but I hadn't gotten around to giving her the news. Perhaps, Miss Dietrich, you'd like to tell her yourself."

Miss Dietrich was always direct. "Nancy Lee," she said, "your picture has won the Artist Club scholarship."

The slender brown girl's eyes widened, her heart jumped, then her throat tightened again. She tried to smile, but instead tears came to her eyes.

"Dear Nancy Lee," Miss O'Shay said, "we are so happy for you." The elderly white woman took her hand and shook it warmly while Miss Dietrich beamed with pride.

Nancy Lee must have danced all the way home. She never remembered quite how she got there through the rain. She hoped she had been dignified. But certainly she hadn't stopped to tell anybody her secret on the way. Raindrops, smiles and tears mingled on her brown cheeks. She hoped her mother hadn't yet gotten home and that the house was empty. She wanted to have time to calm down and look natural before she had to see anyone. She didn't want to be bursting with excitement - having a secret to contain.

Miss O'Shay calling her to the office had been in the nature of a preparation and a warning. The kind, elderly vice-principal said she did not believe in catching young ladies unawares, even with honors, so she wished her to know about the coming award. In making acceptance speeches she wanted her to be calm, prepared, not nervous, overcome²⁰ and frightened, so Nancy Lee was asked to think what she would say when the Scholarship was conferred upon her a few days hence, both at the Friday morning high-school assembly hour when the announcement would be made, and at the evening banquet of the Artist Club. Nancy Lee promised

the vice-principal to think calmly about what she would say.

Miss Dietrich had then asked for some facts about her parents, her background²¹, and her life, since it would probably all be desired for the papers. Nancy Lee had told her how, six years before, they had come up from the Deep South, her father having been successful in achieving a transfer from one post office to another, a thing he had long sought in order to give Nancy Lee a chance to go to school in the North. Now, they lived in a modest Negro neighborhood, went to see the best plays when they came to town, and had been saving to send Nancy Lee to art school, in case she were permitted to enter. But the scholarship would help a great deal, for they were not rich people.

"Now Mother can have a new coat next winter," Nancy Lee thought, "because my tuition will all be covered for the first year. And once in art school, there are other scholarships I can win."

Dreams began to dance through her head, plans and ambitions, beauties she would create for herself, her parents and the Negro people - for Nancy Lee possessed a deep and reverent race pride. She could see the old woman in her picture (really her grandmother in the South) lifting her head to the bright stars on the flag in the distance. A Negro in America! Often hurt, discriminated against, sometimes lynched - but always there were the stars - the blue body of the flag. Was there any other flag in the world that had so many stars? Nancy Lee thought deeply but she could recall none in all the encyclopedias or geographies she had ever looked into.

"Hitch your wagon to a star²²," Nancy Lee thought, dancing home in the rain. "Who were our flag-makers?"

Friday morning came, the morning when the world would know - her high-school world, the newspaper world, her mother and dad. Dad could not be there at the assembly to hear the announcement, nor see her prize picture dis-

played on the stage, nor listen to Nancy Lee's little speech of acceptance; but Mother would be able to come, although Mother was much puzzled as to why Nancy Lee was so insistent she be at school on that particular Friday morning.

When something is happening, something new and fine, something that will change your very life, it is hard to go to sleep at night for thinking about it, and hard to keep your heart from pounding, or a strange little knot of joy from gathering in your throat. Nancy Lee had taken her bath, brushed her hair until it glowed, and had gone to bed thinking about the next day, the big day when, before three thousand students, she would be the one student honored, her painting the one painting to be acclaimed as the best of the year from all the art classes of the city. Her short speech of gratitude was ready. She went over it in her mind, not word for word (because she didn't want it to sound as if she had learned it by heart) but she let the thoughts flow simply and sincerely through her consciousness many times.

When the president of the Artist Club presented her with the medal and scroll of the scholarship, she would say:

"Judges, and members of the Artist Club. I want to thank you for this award that means so much to me personally and through me to my people, the colored people of this city who, sometimes, are discouraged and bewildered, thinking that color and poverty are against them. I accept this award with gratitude and pride, not for myself alone but for my race that believes in American opportunity and American fairness - and the bright stars in our flag. I thank Miss Dietrich and the teachers of this school who made it possible for me to have the knowledge and training that lie behind this honor you have conferred upon my painting. When I came here from the South a few years ago, I was not sure how you would receive me. You

received me well. You have given me a chance, and helped me along the road I wanted to follow. I suppose the judges know that every week here at assembly the students of this school pledge allegiance to the flag. I shall try to be worthy of that pledge, and of the help, and friendship and understanding of my fellow citizens of whatever race or creed, and of our American dream of "Liberty and justice for all!"

That would be her response before the students in the morning. How proud and happy the Negro pupils would be, perhaps as proud as they were of the one colored star on the football team²³. Her mother would probably cry with happiness. Thus Nancy Lee went to sleep dreaming of a wonderful tomorrow.

The bright sunlight of an April morning woke her. There was breakfast with her parents - their half-amused and puzzled faces across the table, wondering what could be this secret that made her eyes so bright. The swift walk to school; the clock in the tower almost nine; hundreds of pupils streaming into the long, rambling old building that was the city's largest high school; the sudden quiet of the home room²⁴ after the bell rang; then the teacher opening her record book²⁵ to call the roll. But just before she began, she looked across the room until her eyes located Nancy Lee.

"Nancy", she said, "Miss O'Shay would like to see you in her office, please."

Nancy Lee rose and went out while the names were being called and the word present added its period to each name²⁶. Perhaps, Nancy Lee thought, the reporters from the papers had already come. Maybe they wanted to take her picture before assembly, which wasn't until ten o'clock. (Last year they had had the photograph of the winner of the award in the morning papers as soon as the announcement had been made.)

Nancy Lee knocked at Miss O'Shay's door.

"Come in."

The vice-principal stood at her desk. There was no one else in the room. It was very quiet.

"Sit down, Nancy Lee," she said. Miss O'Shay did not smile. There was a long pause. The seconds went by slowly. "I do not know how to tell you what I have to say," the elderly woman began, her eyes on the papers on her desk. "I am indignant and ashamed for myself and this city." Then she lifted her eyes and looked at Nancy Lee in the neat blue dress sitting there before her. "You are not to receive the scholarship this morning."

Outside in the hall the electric bells announcing the first period rang, loud and interminably long. Miss O'Shay remained silent. To the brown girl there in the chair, the room grew suddenly smaller, smaller, smaller, and there was no air. She could not speak.

Miss O'Shay said, "When the committee learned that you were colored they changed their plans."

Still Nancy Lee said nothing, for there was no air to give breath to her lungs.

"Here is the letter from the committee, Nancy Lee." Miss O'Shay picked it up and read the final paragraph to her.

"It seems to us wiser to arbitrarily rotate the award among the various high schools of the city from now on. And especially in this case since the student chosen happens to be colored, a circumstance which unfortunately, had we known, might have prevented this embarrassment. But there have never been any Negro students in the local art school and the presence of one there might create difficulties for all concerned. We have high regard for the quality of Nancy Lee Johnson's talent, but we do not feel it would be fair to honor it with the Artist Club award."

Miss O'Shay paused. She put the letter down.

"Nancy Lee, I am very sorry to have to give you this message."

"But my speech", Nancy Lee said, "was about..." The words stuck in her throat. "... about America..."

Miss O'Shay had risen, she turned her back and stood looking out the window at the spring tulips in the school yard.

"I thought, since the award would be made at assembly right after our oath of allegiance," the words tumbled almost hysterically from Nancy Lee's throat now, "I would put part of the flag salute in my speech. You know, Miss O'Shay, that part about 'liberty and justice for all.'"

"I know," said Miss O'Shay slowly facing the room again. "But America is only what we who believe in it, make it. I am Irish. You may not know, Nancy Lee, but years ago we were called the dirty Irish, and mobs rioted against us in the big cities, and we were invited to go back where we came from. But we didn't go. And we didn't give up, because we believed in the American dream, and in our power to make that dream come true. Difficulties, yes. Mountains to climb, yes. Discouragements to face, yes, Democracy to make, yes. That is it, Nancy Lee! We still have in this world of ours democracy to make. You and I, Nancy Lee. But the premise and the base is here, the lines of the Declaration of Independence²⁷ and the words of Lincoln²⁸ are here, and the stars in our flag. Those who deny you this scholarship do not know the meaning of those stars, but it's up to us to make them know. As a teacher in the public schools²⁹ of this City, I myself will go before the school board and ask them to remove from our system the offer of any prizes or awards denied to any student because of race or color." Suddenly Miss O'Shay stopped speaking. Her clear, clear blue eyes looked into those of the girl before her. The woman's eyes were full of strength and courage. "Lift up your head, Nancy Lee, and smile at me."

Miss O'Shay stood against the open window with the green lawn and the tulips beyond, the sunlight tangled in

her gray hair, her voice an electric flow of strenght to the hurt spirit of Nancy Lee. The Abolitionists³⁰ who believed in freedom when there was slavery must have been like that. The first white teachers who went into the Deep South to teach the freed slaves must have been like that. All those who stand against ignorance, narrowness, hate and mud on stars must be like that.

Nancy Lee lifted her head and smiled. The tears were only drops of April rain.

The bell for assembly rang. Nancy Lee went through the long hall filled with students toward the auditorium.

"There will be other awards," Nancy Lee thought. "There're schools in other cities. This won't keep me down. But when I'm a woman, I'll fight to see that these things don't happen to other girls as this has happened to me. And men and women like Miss O'Shay will help me."

She took her seat among the seniors. The doors of the auditorium closed. As the principal came onto the platform, the students rose and turned their eyes to the flag on the stage, with its red and white stripes and stars on the field of blue.

One hand went to the heart, the other outstretched toward the flag. Three thousand voices spoke. Among them was the voice of a dark girl whose cheeks were suddenly wet with tears.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands..."

The words grew stronger, the dark girl's voice grew stronger too.

"One nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." "That is the land we must make," she thought.

* * * * *

Proper Names

Benin	/be'nin/
Congo	/'kɒŋ gou/
Dietrich	/'di:triħ/
George Washington	/'dʒɔ :dʒ 'wɔʃ ɪŋtən/
Joe Williams	/'dʒ ou 'wɪljəmz/
Johnson	/'dʒɔ nsn/
Lincoln	/'li ŋ kən/
Makonde	/məkɒnd/
Michelangelo	/maɪkəl'ændʒ ilou/
Nancy Lee	/'nænsi 'li:/
O'Shay	/o(u) 'ʃei/
Sallie	/'sæli/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... it came in little indirections... - it became known bit by bit (gradually)...
2. ... high school - secondary school in the USA.
3. ... rumors = rumours (the suffix -or in the American variant of the English language corresponds to the British English suffix -our. Some other examples from the text: color, colored, honor.).
4. ... at George Washington High - at George Washington High School.
5. ... an award student - a student who gets a scholarship.
6. ... a few years out of the South - a few years out of one of the southern states of the USA.
7. She stood high in scholarships - she was one of the most brilliant students, (... a top-girl).
8. ... played a swell game of basket-ball - played basket-ball very well.
9. ... had taken part in the senior Musical - had taken part in the music evenings of the high-school graduates (school leavers).

10. ... block print - here: lino-cut off-print (linoöl-löike äratõmme)
11. ... in the Middle West - in the Middle West states of the USA.
12. Benin, Congo, Makonde - localities in Africa. Here a reference is made to the original culture of those localities.
13. ... settlement house - a charity centre.
14. ... college - a kind of higher educational establishment (it may be either independent or attached to a university).
15. ... had gotten - had got ("gotten" is the past participle of the verb "to get" in the American variant of the English language).
16. She let it remain Nancy Lee's own - She left it for Nancy Lee to design and paint it.
17. ... the girls' vice-principal - the assistant director for girls (in a mixed school).
18. ... hoping to make it home between showers - ... hoping to reach home between showers.
19. ... you will not be without honors on the senior list - your name will be entered in the list of those students who graduate with honors.
20. ... be overcome - be excited, upset.
21. ... background - (here) social origin (former activities, education, etc.).
22. Hitch your wagon to a star - harness your wagon to a star
23. ... one colored star on the football team - the only Negro star of the football team (star - a conspicuous player, cf. a filmstar).
24. ... home room - the classroom in which meetings and classteacher's lessons are held in a school where there are special rooms and laboratories for different subjects.
25. ... record book - either the teacher's notebook or the class journal.

26. ... and the word present added its period to each name ... - and the word "present" put a kind of full stop after each name.
27. Declaration of Independence - the statement made by the British colonies in North America, on July 4th, 1776, declaring that they were independent of Britain.
28. Lincoln - Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), president of North America. He abolished Negro slavery there in 1863.
29. ... public schools - tuition-free schools in the USA supported (maintained) by the local authorities (administration).
30. The Abolitionists - people fighting against Negro slavery in North America before the Civil War in 1861-65.

THE LUNCHEON

William Somerset Maugham

1874 - 1965

I caught sight of her at the play¹ and in answer to her beckoning I went over during the interval and sat down beside her. It was long since I had last seen her and if someone had not mentioned her name I hardly think I would have recognized her. She addressed me brightly.

"Well, it's many years since we first met. How time does fly! We're none of us getting any younger. Do you remember the first time I saw you? You asked me to luncheon".

Did I remember?

It was twenty years ago and I was living in Paris. I had a tiny apartment in the Latin Quarter² overlooking a cemetery and I was earning barely enough money to keep body and soul together. She had read a book of mine and had written to me about it. I answered, thanking her, and presently I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris and would like to have a chat with me; but her time was limited and the only free moment she had was on the following Thursday; she was spending the morning at the Luxembourg³ and would I give her a little luncheon at Foyet's⁴ afterwards? Foyet's is a restaurant at which the French senators eat and it was so far beyond my means⁵ that I had never thought of going there. But I was flattered and I was too young to have learned to say no to a woman. (Few men, I may add, learn this until they are too old to make it of any consequence⁶ to a woman what they say). I had eighty francs (gold francs) to last me the rest of the month and a modest luncheon should not cost more than fifteen. If I cut out coffee for the next two weeks I could manage well enough.

I answered that I would meet my friend - by correspondence - at Foyet's on Thursday at half-past twelve. She was not so young as I expected and in appearance imposing rather than attractive. She was in fact a woman of forty (a charming age, but not one that excites a sudden and devastating passion at first sight), and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large, and even, than were necessary for any practical purpose. She was talkative but since she seemed inclined to talk about me I was prepared to be an attentive listener.

I was startled when the bill of fare was brought, for the prices were a great deal higher than I had anticipated. But she reassured me.

"I never eat anything for luncheon", she said.

"Oh, don't say that!" I answered generously.

"I never eat more than one thing. I think people eat far too much nowadays. A little fish, perhaps, I wonder if they have any salmon".

Well, it was early in the year for salmon and it was not on the bill of fare but I asked the waiter if there was any. Yes, a beautiful salmon had just come in, it was the first they had had. I ordered it for my guest. The waiter asked her if she would have something while it was being cooked.

"No", she answered, "I never eat more than one thing. Unless you had a little caviare, I never mind caviare".

My heart sank a little⁷. I knew I could not afford caviare, but I could not very well tell her that. I told the waiter by all means to bring caviare. For myself I chose the cheapest dish on the menu and that was a mutton chop.

"I think you're unwise to eat meat", she said. "I don't know how you can expect to work after eating heavy things like chops. I don't believe in overloading my stomach".

Then came the question of drink.

"I never drink anything for luncheon", she said.

"Neither do I", I answered promptly.

"Except white wine", she proceeded as though I had not spoken. "These French white wines are so light. They're wonderful for the digestion."

"What would you like?" I asked, hospitable still, but not exactly effusive.

She gave me a bright and amicable flash of her white teeth.

"My doctor won't let me drink anything but champagne".

I fancy I turned a trifle pale. I ordered half a bottle. I mentioned casually that my doctor had absolutely forbidden me to drink champagne.

"What are you going to drink then?"

"Water".

She ate the caviare and she ate the salmon. She talked gaily of art and literature and music. But I wondered what the bill would come to. When my mutton chop arrived she took me quite seriously to task.⁸

"I see that you're in the habit of eating a heavy luncheon. I'm sure it's a mistake. Why don't you follow my example and just eat one thing? I'm sure you'd feel ever so much better for it".

"I am only going to eat one thing", I said, as the waiter came again with the bill of fare.

She waved him aside with an airy gesture.

"No, no, I never eat anything for lucheon Just a bite, I never want more than that, and I eat that more as an excuse for conversation than anything else. I couldn't possibly eat anything more - unless they had some of those giant asparagus. I should be sorry to leave Paris without having some of them".

My heart sank. I had seen them in the shops and I knew that they were horribly expensive. My mouth had often watered at the sight of them.

"Madame wants to know if you have any of those giant asparagus", I asked the waiter.

I tried with all my might to will him to say no.⁹ A happy smile spread over his broad, priest-like face, and he assured me that they had some so large, so splendid, so tender, that it was a marvel.

"I'm not in the least hungry", my guest sighed, "but if you insist I don't mind having some asparagus",

I ordered them.

"Aren't you going to have any?"

"No, I never eat asparagus".

"I know there are people who don't like them. The fact is, you ruin your palate by all the meat you eat".

We waited for the asparagus to be cooked. Panic seized me. It was not a question now how much money I should have left over for the rest of the month, but whether I had enough to pay the bill. It would be mortifying to find myself ten francs short¹⁰ and be obliged to borrow from the guest. I could not bring myself to do that. I knew exactly how much I had and if the bill came to more I made up my mind that I would put my hand in my pocket and with the dramatic cry start up and say it had been picked.¹¹ Of course, it would be awkward if she had not money enough either to pay the bill. Then the only thing would be to leave the watch and say I would come back and pay later.

The asparagus appeared. They were enormous, succulent and appetizing. The smell of the melted butter tickled my nostrils as the nostrils of Jehovan were tickled by the burned offerings of the virtuous Semites.¹² I watched the abandoned woman thrust them down her throat in large voluptuous mouthfuls and in my polite way I discoursed on the condition of the drama in the Balkans. At last she finished.

"Coffee?" I said.

"Yes, just an ice-cream and coffee", she answered.

I was past caring now, so I ordered coffee for myself and an ice-cream and coffee for her.

"You know there's one thing I thoroughly believe in", she said, as she ate the ice-cream. "One should always get up from a meal feeling one could eat a little more."

"Are you still hungry?" I asked faintly.

"Oh, no, I'm not hungry; you see, I don't eat luncheon. I have a cup of coffee in the morning and then dinner, but I never eat more than one thing for luncheon. I was speaking for you".

"Oh, I see!"

Then a terrible thing happened. While we were waiting for the coffee, the head waiter with an ingratiating smile in his false face, came up to us bearing a large basket full of huge peaches. They had the blush of an innocent girl; they had the rich tone of an Italian landscape. But surely peaches were not in season then?¹³ Lord knew what they cost. I knew too - a little later, for my guest, going on with her conversation, absent-mindedly took one.

"You see, you've filled your stomach with a lot of meat" - my one miserable little chop - "and you can't eat any more. But I've just had a snack and I shall enjoy a peach."

The bill came and when I paid it I found that I had only enough for a quite inadequate tip. Her eyes rested for an instant on the three francs I left for the waiter and I knew that she thought me mean. But when I walked out of the restaurant I had the whole month before me and not a penny in my pocket.

"Follow my example", she said as we shook hands "and never eat more than one thing for luncheon".

"I'll do better than that". I retorted, "I'll eat nothing for dinner tonight".

"Humorist!" she cried gaily, jumping into a cab. "You're quite a humorist!"

But I have had my revenge at last: I do not believe that I am a vindictive man, but when the immortal gods

14

take a hand in the matter it is pardonable to observe the result with complacency. Today she weighs three hundred pounds.¹⁵

Proper Names

Balkans /bɔːlk(ə)nz/
Foyet /'fwajet/
Latin Quarter /'lætin 'kwɔːtə /
Luxembourg /'lʌksəmbɜːg/
Paris /'pærɪs/
Semite /'semaɪt/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... at the play - at the theatre
2. ... the Latin Quarter - a district in Paris inhabited mostly by students, poor artists and writers
3. ... the Luxembourg - name of a hotel
4. ... at Foyet's - at Foyet's restaurant (compare: at the chemist's shop)
5. ... so far beyond my means - too expensive for me
6. ... to make it of any consequence - to make it important
7. My heart sank a little - I became a bit frightened
8. She took me ... to task - she found fault with me (rebuked me)
9. ... to will him to say no - wanted him to say no
10. ... to find myself ten francs short - to have ten francs less than needed
11. ... it had been picked - my money had been stolen
12. ... as the nostrils of Jehovah were tickled by the burned offerings of the virtuous Semites - here reference is made to a pleasant smell.
13. ... peaches were not in season then - it was not the time for peaches yet
14. ... when the immortal gods take a hand in the matter - when they have a share in the matter
15. ... three hundred pounds - 136 kilogrammes

LAUGHTER

William Saroyan

1908

"You want me to laugh?"

He felt lonely and ill in the empty classroom, all the boys going home, Dan Seed, James Misippo, Dick Corcoran, all of them walking along the Southern Pacific tracks¹, laughing and playing, and this insane idea of Miss Wissig's, making him sick.

"Yes."

The severe lips, the trembling, the eyes, such pathetic melancholy.

"But I do not want to laugh."

It was strange. The whole world, the turn of things,² the way they came about.

"Laugh."

The increasing tenseness, electrical, her stiffness, the nervous movements of her body and her arms, the cold she made, and the illness in his blood.

"But why?"

Why? Everything tied up, everything graceless and ugly, the caught mind, something in a trap, no sense, no meaning.

"As a punishment. You laughed in class, now as a punishment you must laugh for an hour, all alone, by yourself. Hurry, you have already wasted four minutes."

It was disgusting; it wasn't funny at all, being kept after school, being asked to laugh. There was no sense in the idea. What should he laugh about? A fellow couldn't just laugh. There had to be something of that kind, something amusing or pompous, something comical. This was so strange, because of her manner, the way she looked at him, the subtlety; it was frightening.

What did she want of him? And the smell of school, the oil in the floor, chalk dust, the smell of the idea, children gone; loneliness, the sadness.

"I am sorry, I laughed."

The flower bending, ashamed. He felt sorry, he was not merely bluffing; he was sorry, not for himself but for her. She was a young girl, a substitute teacher, and there was that sadness in her, so far away and so hard to understand; it came with her each morning and he had laughed at it, it was comical, something she said, the way she said it, the way she stared at everyone, the way she moved. He hadn't felt like laughing³ at all, but all of a sudden he had laughed and she had looked at him and he had looked into her face, and for a moment that vague communion, then the anger, the hatred, in her eyes. "You will stay in after school." He hadn't wanted to laugh, it simply happened, and he was sorry, he was ashamed, she ought to know, he was telling her, Jiminy crickets.⁴

"You are wasting time. Begin laughing."

Her back was turned and she was erasing words from the blackboard: Africa, Cairo, the pyramids, the sphinx, Nile; and the figures 1865, 1914. But the tenseness, even with her back turned; it was still in the classroom, emphasized because of the emptiness, magnified, made precise, his mind and her mind, their grief, side by side, conflicting; why? He wanted to be friendly; the morning she had entered the classroom he had wanted to be friendly; he felt it immediately, her strangeness, the remoteness, so why had he laughed? Why did everything happen in a false way? Why should he be the one to hurt her, when really he had wanted to be her friend from the beginning?

"I don't want to laugh."

Defiance and at the same time weeping, shameful weeping in his voice. By what right should he be made to destroy in himself an innocent thing? He hadn't meant

to be cruel: why shouldn't she be able to understand? He began to feel hatred for her stupidity, her dullness, the stubbornness of her will. I will not laugh, he thought; he thought; she can call Mr. Caswell and have me whipped; I will not laugh again. It was a mistake. I had meant to cry; something else, anyway; I hadn't meant it. I can stand a whipping, golly Moses,⁵ it hurts, but not like this; I've felt that strap on my behind, I know the difference.

Well, let them whip him, what did he care? It stung and he could feel the sharp pain for days after, thinking about it, but let them go ahead and make him bend over, he wouldn't laugh.

He saw her sit at her desk and stare at him, and for crying out loud, she looked sick and startled, and the pity came up to his mouth again, the sickening pity for her, and why was he making so much trouble for a poor substitute teacher he really liked, not an old and ugly teacher, but a nice small girl who was frightened from the first?

"Please laugh."

And what humiliation, not commanding him, begging him now, begging him to laugh when he didn't want to laugh. What should a fellow do, honestly; what should a fellow do that would be right, by his own will, not accidentally, like the wrong things? And what did she mean? What pleasure could she get out of hearing him laugh? What a stupid world, the strange feelings of people, the secretiveness, each person hidden within himself, wanting something and always getting something else, wanting to give something and always giving something else. Well, he would. Now he would laugh, not for himself but for her. Even if it sickened him, he would laugh. He wanted to know the truth, how it was. She wasn't making him laugh, she was asking him, begging him to laugh. He didn't know how it was, but he wanted to know. He thought, maybe I

can think of a funny story, and he began to try to remember all the funny stories he had ever heard, but it was very strange, he couldn't remember a single one. And the other funny things, the way Annie Gran walked; gee,⁶ it wasn't funny any more; and Henry Mayo making fun of Hiawatha, saying the lines wrong; it wasn't funny either. It used to make him laugh until his face got red and he lost his breath, but now it was a dead and a pointless thing, by the big sea waters, by the big sea waters, came the mighty, but gee, it wasn't funny; he couldn't laugh about it, golly Moses. Well, he would just laugh, any old laugh, be an actor, ha, ha ha. God, it was hard, the easiest, thing in the world for him to do, and now he couldn't make a little giggle.

Somehow he began to laugh, feeling ashamed and disgusted. He was afraid to look into her eyes, so he looked up at the clock and tried to keep on laughing, and it was startling, to ask a boy to laugh for an hour, at nothing, to beg him to laugh without giving him a reason. But he would do it, maybe not an hour, but he would try, anyway; he would do something. The funniest thing was his voice, the falseness of his laughter, and after a while it got to be really funny, a comical thing, and it made him happy because it made him really laugh, and now he was laughing his real way, with all his breath, with all his blood, laughing at the falseness of his laughter, and the shame was going away because this laughter was not fake, and it was the truth, and the empty classroom was full of his laughter and everything seemed all right, everything was splendid, and two minutes had gone by.

And he began to think of really comical things everywhere, the whole town, the people walking in the streets, trying to look important, but he knew, they couldn't fool him, he knew how important they were, and the way they talked, big business, and all of it pompous

and fake, and it made him laugh, and he thought of the preacher at the Presbyterian church, the fake way he prayed, O God, if it is your will, and nobody believing in prayers, and the important people with big automobiles, Cadillacs and Packards, speeding up and down the country, as if they had some place to go, and the public band concerts, all that fake stuff, making him really laugh, and the big boys running after the big girls because of the heat,⁷ and the street cars going up and down the city with never more than two passengers, that was funny, those big cars carrying an old lady and a man with a moustache, and he laughed until he lost his breath and his face got red, and suddenly all the shame was gone and he was laughing and looking at Miss Wissig, and then bang:⁸ jiminy Christmas, tears in her eyes. For God's sake, he hadn't been laughing at her. He had been laughing at all those fools, all those fool things they were doing day after day, all that falseness. It was disgusting. He was always wanting to do the right thing, and it was always turning out the other way. He wanted to know why, how it was with her, inside, the part that was secret, and he had laughed for her, not to please himself, and there she was, trembling, her eyes wet and tears coming out of them, and her face in agony, and he was still laughing because of all the anger and yearning and disappointment in his heart, and he was laughing at all the pathetic things in the world, the things good people cried about, the stray dogs in the streets, the tired horses being whipped, stumbling, the timid people being smashed inwardly by the fat and cruel people, fat inside, pompous, and the small birds, dead on the sidewalk, and the misunderstandings everywhere, the everlasting conflict, the cruelty, the things that made man a malignant thing, a vile growth, and the anger was changing his laughter and tears were coming into his eyes. The two of them in the empty classroom, naked together in their loneliness and bewilderment, brother. and sister, both of them wanting the same cleanliness and

decency of life, both of them wanting to share the truth of the other, and yet, somehow, both of them alien, remote and alone.

He heard the girl stifle a sob and then everything turned upside-down, and he was crying, honest and truly crying, like a baby, as if something had really happened, and he hid his face in his arms, and his chest was heaving, and he was thinking he did not want to live; if this was the way it was, he wanted to be dead.

He did not know how long he cried, and suddenly he was aware that he was no longer crying or laughing, and that the room was very still. What a shameful thing. He was afraid to lift his head and look at the teacher. It was disgusting.

"Ben."

The voice calm, quiet, solemn; how could he ever look at her again?

"Ben"

He lifted his head. Her eyes were dry and her face seemed brighter and more beautiful than ever.

"Please dry your eyes. Have you a handkerchief?"

"Yes."

He wiped the moisture from his eyes, and blew his nose. What a sickness in the earth. How bleak everything was.

"How old are you, Ben?"

"Ten."

"What are you going to do? I mean ——"

"I don't know."

"Your father?"

"He is a tailor."

"Do you like it here?"

"I guess so."

"You have brothers, sisters?"

"Three brothers, two sisters."

"Do you ever think of going away? Other cities?"

It was amazing, talking to him as if he were a grown person, getting into his secret.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't know, New York, I guess. The old country, maybe."

"The old country?"

"Milan. My father's city."

"Oh."

He wanted to ask her about herself, where she had been, where she was going; he wanted to be grown up, but he was afraid. She went to the cloakroom and brought out her coat and hat and purse, and began to put on her coat.

"I will not be here to-morrow. Miss Shorb is well again. I am going away."

He felt very sad, but he could think of nothing to say. She tightened the belt of her coat and placed her hat on her head, smiling, golly Moses, what a world, first she made him laugh, then she made him cry, and now this. And it made him feel so lonely for her. Where was she going? Wouldn't he ever see her again?

"You may go now, Ben."

And there he was looking up at her and not wanting to go, there he was wanting to sit and look at her. He got up slowly and went to the cloakroom for his cap. He walked to the door, feeling ill with loneliness, and turned to look at her for the last time.

"Good-bye, Miss Wissig."

"Good-bye, Ben."

And then he was running lickety split⁹ across the school grounds, and the young substitute teacher was standing in the yard, following him with her eyes. He didn't know what to think, but he knew that he was feeling very sad and that he was afraid to turn around and see if she was looking at him. He thought, if I hurry, maybe I can catch up with Dan Seed and Dick Corcoran and the other

boys, and maybe I'll be in time to see the freight train leaving town. Well, nobody would know, anyway. Nobody would ever know what had happened and how he had laughed and cried.

He ran all the way to the Southern Pacific tracks, and all the boys were gone, and the train was gone, and he sat down beneath the eucalyptus trees. The whole world, in a mess.

Then he began to cry again.

* * * * *

Proper Names

1. Annie Gran	/ˈæni ˈtræn/
2. Cadillac	/ˈkædɪlæk/
3. Cairo	/ˈkaɪərou/ (U.S. /ˈkɛərou/)
4. Caswell	/ˈkæzweɪ/
5. Dan Seed	/ˈdæn ˈsi:d/
6. Dick Corcoran	/ˈdɪk ˈkɔ:kərən/
7. Henry Mayo	/ˈhenri ˈmaɪou/
8. Hiawatha	/ˌhaɪəˈwɒθə/
9. James Mississippi	/ˈdʒeɪmz mɪzɪpou/
10. Milan	/ˈmiːlən/
11. Moses	/ˈmouzɪz/
12. New York	/ˈnju: ˈjɔ:k/
13. Nile	/naɪl/
14. Pacific	/pəˈsɪfɪk/
15. Packard	/ˈpækɑ:d/
16. Shorb	/ʃɔ:b/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... the Southern Pacific tracks - the Southern Pacific railway
2. ... the turn of things - the change of things
3. He hadn't felt like laughing - He had not wanted to laugh ...
4. Jimini crickets - (excl. in American slang - Good heavens!)
5. ... Golly Moses - Holey Moses (interj.)
6. ... Gee - (American slang) - Good heavens! (interj.)
7. ... the big boys running after the big girls because of the heat ... because of love
8. ... and then bang: - and then suddenly a shock:
9. ... he was running lickety split - he was running very fast

THE BROGUE

H.H. Munro

1870-1916

The hunting season had come to an end, and the Mulletts had not succeeded in selling the Brogue.¹ There had been a kind of tradition in the family for the past three or four years, a sort of fatalistic hope, that the Brogue would find a purchaser before the hunting was over; but seasons came and went without anything happening to justify such ill-founded optimism. The animal had been named Berserker in the earlier stages of its career; it had been rechristened the Brogue later on, in recognition of the fact that, once acquired, it was extremely difficult to get rid of. The unkinder wits of the neighbourhood had been known to suggest that the first letter of its name was superfluous. The Brogue had been variously described in sale catalogues as a light-weight hunter, a lady's hack, and, more simply, but still with a touch of imagination, as a useful brown gelding, standing 15.8.² Toby Mullet had ridden him four seasons with the West Wessex,³ you can ride almost any sort of horse with the West Wessex as long as it is an animal that knows the country. The Brogue knew the country intimately, having personally created most of the gaps that were to be met with in banks and hedges for many miles round. His manners and characteristics were not ideal in the hunting field, but he was probably rather safer to ride to hounds⁴ than he was as a hack on country roads. According to the Mullet family, he was not really road-shy,⁵ but there were one or two objects of dislike that brought on sudden attacks of what Toby called swerving sickness. Motors and cycles he treated with tolerant disregard, but pigs, wheel-barrows, piles of stones by the roadside, perambulators in a vil-

lage street, gates painted too aggressively white, and sometimes, but not always, the newer kind of beehives, turned him aside from his tracks in vivid imitation of the zigzag course of forked lightning. If a pheasant rose noisily from the other side of a hedgerow the Brogue would spring into the air at the same moment, but this may have been due to a desire to be companionable. The Mullet family contradicted the widely prevalent report that the horse was a confirmed crib-biter.

It was about the third week in May that Mrs. Mullet, relict of the late Sylvester Mullet, and mother of Toby and a bunch of daughters, assailed Clovis Sangrail on the outskirts of the village with a breathless catalogue of local happenings.⁶

"You know our new neighbour, Mr. Penricarde?" she vociferated; "awfully rich, owns tin mines in Cornwall, middle-aged and rather quiet. He's taken the Red House on a long lease and spent a lot of money on alterations and improvements. Well, Toby's sold him the Brogue!"

Clovis spent a month or two in assimilating the astonishing news; then he broke out into unstinted congratulation. If he had belonged to a more emotional race he would probably have kissed Mrs. Mullet.

"How wonderful lucky to have pulled it off" at last! Now you can buy a decent animal. I've always said that Toby was clever. Ever so many congratulations."

"Don't congratulate me. It's the most unfortunate thing that could have happened!" said Mrs. Mullet dramatically.

Clovis stared at her in amazement.

"Mr. Penricarde," said Mrs. Mullet, sinking her voice to what she imagined to be an impressive whisper, though it rather resembled a hoarse, excited squeak, "Mr. Penricarde has just begun to pay attentions to Jessie. Slight at first, but now unmistakable. I was a fool not to have seen it sooner. Yesterday, at the Rec-

tory garden party, he asked her what her favorite flowers were, and she told him carnations, and today a whole stack of carnations has arrived, clove and malmaison⁸ and lovely dark red ones, regular exhibition blooms, and a box of chocolates that he must have got on purpose from London. And he's asked her to go round the links⁹ with him tomorrow. And now, just at this critical moment, Toby has sold him that animal! It's a calamity!"

"But you've been trying to get the horse off your hands for years," said Clovis.

"I've got a houseful of daughters," said Mrs. Mullet, "and I've been trying - well, not to get them off my hands, of course, but a husband or two wouldn't be amiss among the lot of them; there are six of them, you know."

"I don't know," said Clovis, "I've never counted, but I expect you're right as to the number; mothers generally know these things."

"And now," continued Mrs. Mullet, in her tragic whisper, "when there's a rich husband-in-prospect imminent on the horizon Toby goes and sells him that miserable animal. It will probably kill him if he tries to ride it; anyway it will kill any affection he might have felt towards any member of our family. What is to be done? We can't very well ask to have the horse back; you see, we praised it up like anything when we thought there was a chance of his buying it, and said it was just the animal to suit him."

"Couldn't you steal it out of his stable and send it to grass at some farm miles away?" suggested Clovis. "Write 'Votes for Women' on the stable door, and the thing would pass for a Suffragette outrage."¹⁰ No one who knew the horse could possibly suspect you of wanting to get it back again."

"Every newspaper in the country would ring with the affair," said Mrs. Mullet; "can't you imagine the headline, 'Valuable Hunter Stolen by Suffragettes'? The police would scour the countryside till they found the animal."

"Well, Jessie must try and get it back from Penricarde on the plea that it's an old favourite. She can say it was only sold because the stable had to be pulled down under the terms of an old repairing lease, and that now it has been arranged that the stable is to stand for a couple of years longer."

"It sounds a queer proceeding to ask for a horse back when you've just sold him," said Mrs. Mullet, "but something must be done, and done at once. The man is not used to horses, and I believe I told him it was as quiet as a lamb. After all, lambs go kicking and twisting about as if they were demented, don't they?"

"The lamb has an entirely unmerited character for sedateness," agreed Clovis.

Jessie came back from the golf links next day in a state of mingled elation and concern.

"It's all right about the proposal," she announced, "he came out with it at the sixth hole.¹¹ I said I must have time to think it over. I accepted him at the seventh."

"My dear," said her mother, "I think a little more maidenly reserve and hesitation would have been advisable, as you've known him so short a time. You might have waited till the ninth hole."

"The seventh is a very long hole," said Jessie; "besides, the tension was putting us both off our game." By the time we'd got to the ninth hole we'd settled lots of things. The honeymoon is to be spent in Corsica, with perhaps a flying visit to Naples if we feel like it, and a week in London to wind up with. Two of his nieces are to be asked to be bridesmaids, so with our lot there will be seven, which is rather a lucky number. You are to wear your pearl grey, with any amount of Honiton lace¹² jabbed into it. By the way, he's coming over this evening to ask your consent to the whole affair. So far all's well, but about the Brogue it's a different matter. I told

him the legend about the stable, and how keen we were about buying the horse back, but he seems equally keen on keeping it. He said he must have horse exercise now that he's living in the country, and he's going to start riding to-morrow. He's ridden a few times in the Row¹³ on an animal that was accustomed to carry octogenarians and people undergoing rest cures, and that's about all his experience in the saddle - oh, and he rode a pony once in Norfolk, when he was fifteen and the pony twenty-four; and tomorrow he's going to ride the Brogue! I shall be a widow before I'm married, and I do so want to see what Corsica's like; it looks so silly on the map."

Glovis was sent for in haste, and the developments of the situation put before him.

"Nobody can ride that animal with any safety," said Mrs. Mullet, "except Toby, and he knows by long experience what it is going to shy at, and manages to swerve at the same time.

"I did not hint to Mr. Penricarde - to Vincent, I should say - that the Brogue didn't like white gates," said Jessie.

"White gates!" exclaimed Mrs. Mullet; "Did you mention what effect a pig has on him? He'll have to go past Lockyer's farm to get to the high road, and there's sure to be a pig or two grunting about on the lane."

"He's taken rather a dislike to turkeys lately," said Toby.

"It's obvious that Penricarde mustn't be allowed to go out on that animal," said Glovis, "at least not till Jessie has married him, and tired of him. I tell you what: ask him to a picnic tomorrow, starting at an early hour; he is not the sort to go out for a ride before breakfast. The day after I'll get the rector to drive him over to Crowleigh before lunch, to see the new cottage hospital they're building there. The Brogue will be standing idle in the stable and Toby can offer to

exercise it; then it can pick up a stone or something of the sort and go conveniently lame. If you hurry on the wedding a bit the lameness fiction can be kept up till the ceremony is safely over."

Mrs. Mullet belonged to an emotional race, and she kissed Clovis.

It was nobody's fault that the rain came down in torrents the next morning, making a picnic a fantastic impossibility. It was also nobody's fault, but sheer ill-luck, that the weather cleared up sufficiently in the afternoon to tempt Mr. Penricarde to make his first essay with the Brogue. They did not get as far as the pigs at Lockyer's farm; the rectory gate was painted a dull unobtrusive green, but it had been white a year or two ago, and the Brogue never forgot that he had been in the habit of making a violent curtsey, a backpedal¹⁴ and a swerve at this particular point of the road. Subsequently, there being apparently no further call on his services, he broke his way into the rectory orchard, where he found a hen turkey in a coop; later visitors to the orchard found the coop almost intact, but very little left of the turkey.

Mr. Penricarde, a little stunned and shaken, and suffering from a bruised knee and some minor damages, goodnaturedly ascribed the accident to his own inexperience with horses and country roads, and allowed Jessie to nurse him back into complete recovery and golf-fitness within something less than a week.

In the list of wedding presents which the local newspaper published a fortnight or so later appeared the following item:

"Brown saddle-horse, 'The Brogue' bridegroom's gift to bride".

"Which shows", said Toby Mullet, "that he knew nothing." "Or else," said Clovis, "that he has a very pleasing wit."

Proper Names

Berserker	/'bɜ:sə:kə/
Brogue	/brɒg /
Olovis Sangrail	/'klɒvɪs 'sæŋgreɪl/
Corsica	/'kɔ:sɪkə/
Crowleigh	/'krouli/
Honiton	/'hɒnɪtən/
Jessie	/'dʒesi/
Lockyer	/'lɒkjə/
London	/'lʌndən/
Mullet	/'mʌlɪt/
Naples	/'neɪplz/
Norfolk	/'nɔ:fək/
Penricarde	/'penrɪkɑ:d/
Sylvester	/sɪl'vestə/
Toby	/'toubi/
Vincent	/'vɪns(ə)nt/
Wessex	/'wesɪks/

Explanatory Notes

1. the Brogue - the name of the horse is derived from the word "brogue" meaning provincial accent, especially the Irish manner of speaking English. The name is used in a funny sense referring to the fact that it is as difficult to get rid of the horse as of one's provincial accent.
2. ... standing 15.9 - i.e. 15 hands 9 inches. A "hand" is a measurement (the breadth of a hand) - 4 inches (i.e. 10,16 cm) used for measuring the height of a horse (from the ground to the top of the shoulder).

3. ... had ridden him four seasons with the West Wessex -
had ridden him during four seasons of fox-hunt-
ing as a member of the Wessex Hunting Club.
4. ... to ride to hounds - to take part in fox-hunting
on horseback and with hounds.
5. ... road-shy - afraid of roads and traffic
6. ... with a breathless catalogue of local happenings -
an account of local happenings given in one
breath.
7. ... to have pulled it off - (colloq.) - to have
succeeded in it (in getting rid of the horse).
8. ... clove and malmaison - kinds of carnation with
big blossoms.
9. ... to go round the links - to play golf. A links -
a piece of ground on which golf is played.
10. ... would pass for a Suffragette outrage - would be
taken as an act of violence by suffragettes.
"Suffragettes" were women, who fought for votes
for women and for women's political rights in
England before 1914. Very often they used vio-
lence to show their protest.
11. ... the sixth hole - (in golf) the sixth hollow in the
grass into which the ball must be driven (the
links is divided either into 9 or 12 parts i.e.
holes which are enumerated).
12. ... Honiton lace - a kind of hand-made lace named
after the English town Honiton.
13. The Row - i.e. Rotten Row, a riding - track for
aristocrates and upper middle-class people in
Hyde Park, London.
14. ... to make a backpedal - to go backward.

THE OLD CHIEF MSHLANGA

Doris May Lessing

1919

They were good, the years of ranging the bush¹ over her father's farm which, like every white farm, was largely unused, broken only occasionally by small patches of cultivation. In between, nothing but trees, the long sparse grass, thorn and cactus and gully, grass and outcrop and thorn. And a jutting piece of rock which had been thrust up from the warm soil of Africa unimaginable eras of time ago, washed into hollows and whorls by sun and wind that had travelled so many thousands of miles of space and bush, would hold the weight of a small girl whose eyes were sightless for anything but a pale willowed river, a pale gleaming castle - a small girl singing: "Out flew the web and floated wide, the mirror cracked from side to side..."²

Pushing her way through the green aisles of the mealie stalks, the leaves arching like cathedrals veined with sunlight³ far overhead, with the packed red earth under foot, a fine lace of red-starred witchweed⁴ would summon up a black bent figure croaking premonitions: the Northern witch, bred of cold Northern forests, would stand before her among the mealie fields, and it was the mealie fields that faded and fled, leaving her among the gnarled roots of an oak, snow falling thick and soft and white, the woodcutter's fire glowing red welcome through crowding tree trunks.

A white child, opening its eyes curiously on a sun-suffused landscape, a gaunt and violent landscape, might be supposed to accept it as her own, to take the msasa trees⁵ and the thorn trees as familiars, to feel her blood running free and responsive to the swing of the seasons.⁶

This child could not see a msasa tree, or the thorn, for what they were.⁷ Her books held tales of alien fairies, her rivers ran slow and peaceful, and she knew the shape of the leaves of an ash or an oak, the names of the little creatures that lived in English streams, when the words "the veld"⁸ meant strangeness, though she could remember nothing else.

Because of this, for many years, it was the veld that seemed unreal; the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language.

The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass, mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say "Yes, Bass,"⁹ take their money and go. They changed season by season, moving from one farm to the next, according to their outlandish needs, which one did not have to understand, coming from perhaps hundreds of miles North or East, passing on after a few months - where? Perhaps even as far away as the fabled gold mines of Johannesburg,¹⁰ where the pay was so much better than the few shillings a month and the double handful of mealie meal twice a day which they earned in that part of Africa.

The child was taught to take them for granted; the servants in the house would come running a hundred yards to pick up a book if she dropped it. She was called "Nkosikaas"¹¹ - Chieftainess, even by the black children her own age.

Later, when the farm grew too small to hold her curiosity, she carried a gun in the crook of her arm and wandered miles a day, from vlei¹² to vlei, from kopje¹³ to kopje, accompanied by two dogs: the dogs and the gun were an armour against fear. Because of them she never felt fear.

If a native came into a sight along the kaffir¹⁴ paths half a mile away, the dogs would flush him up a

tree as if he were a bird. If he expostulated (in his uncouth language which was by itself ridiculous) that was cheek. If one was in a good mood, it could be a matter for laughter. Otherwise one passed on, hardly glancing at the angry native in the tree.

On the rare occasions when white children met together they could amuse themselves by hailing a passing native in order to make a buffoon of him;¹⁵ they could set the dogs on to him and watch him run; they could tease a small black child as if he were a puppy - save that they would not throw stones and sticks at a dog without a sense of guilt.

Later still, certain questions presented themselves in the child's mind; and because the answers were not easy to accept, they were silenced by an even greater arrogance of manner.

It was even impossible to think of the black people who worked about the house as friends, for if she talked to one of them, her mother would come running anxiously: "Come away; you mustn't talk to natives."

It was this instilled consciousness of danger, of something unpleasant, that made it easy to laugh out loud, crudely, if a servant made a mistake in his English or if he failed to understand an order - there is a certain kind of laughter that is fear, afraid of itself.

One evening, when I was about fourteen, I was walking down the side of a mealie field that had been newly ploughed, so that the great red clods showed fresh and tumbling to the vleis beyond, like a choppy red sea; it was that hushed and listening hour, when the birds send long sad calls from tree to tree, and all the colours of earth and sky and leaf are deep and golden. I had my rifle in the curve of my arm, and the dogs were at my heels.

In front of me, perhaps a couple of hundred yards away, a group of three natives came into sight around the

side of a big ant-heap. I whistled the dogs close in to my skirts and let the gun swing in my hand, and advanced, waiting for them to move aside, off the path, in respect for my passing. But they came on steadily, and the dogs looked up at me for the command to chase. I was angry. It was "cheek" for a native not to stand off a path, the moment he caught sight of you.

In front walked an old man, stooping his weight on to a stick, his hair grizzled white, a dark red blanket slung over his shoulders like a cloak. Behind him came two young men, carrying bundles of pots, assegais, hatchets.

The group was not a usual one. They were not natives seeking work. These had an air of dignity, of quietly following their own purpose. It was the dignity that checked my tongue. I walked quietly on, talking softly to the growling dogs, till I was ten paces away. Then the old man stopped, drawing his blanket close.

"Morning, Nkosikaas," he said, using the customary greeting for any time of the day.

"Good morning," I said. "Where are you going?" My voice was a little truculent.

The old man spoke in his own language, then one of the young men stepped forward politely and said in careful English: "My Chief travels to see his brothers beyond the river."

A Chief? I thought, understanding the pride that made the old man stand before me like an equal - more than an equal, for he showed courtesy, and I showed none.

The old man spoke again, wearing dignity like an inherited garment, still standing ten paces off, flanked by his entourage, not looking at me (that would have been rude) but directing his eyes somewhere over my head at the trees.

"You are the little Nkosikaas from the farm of Baas Jordan?"

"That's right", I said.

"Perhaps your father does not remember," said the interpreter for the old man, "but there was an affair with some goats. I remember seeing you when you were..." The young man held his hand at knee level and smiled.

We all smiled.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"This is Chief Mshlanga," said the young man.

"I will tell my father that I met you," I said.

The old man said: "My greetings to your father, little Nkosikaas."

"Good morning," I said politely, finding the politeness difficult, from lack of use.

"Morning, little Nkosikaas," said the old man, and stood aside to let me pass.

I went by, my gun hanging awkwardly, the dogs sniffing and growling, cheated of their favourite game of chasing natives like animals.

Not long afterwards I read in an old explorer's book the phrase: "Chief Mshlanga's country." It went like this: "Our destination was Chief Mshlanga's country, to the north of the river; and it was our desire to ask his permission to prospect for gold in his territory."

The phrase "ask his permission" was so extraordinary to a white child, brought up to consider all natives as things to use, that it revived those questions, which could not be suppressed: they fermented slowly in my mind.

On another occasion one of those old prospectors who still move over Africa looking for neglected reefs, with their hammers and tents, and pans for sifting gold from crushed rock, came to the farm and, in talking of the old days, used that phrase again: "This was the Old Chief's country," he said. "It stretched from those mountains over there way back to the river, hundreds of miles of country. That was his name for our district: "The Old Chief's Country"; he did not use our name for it - a

new phrase which held no implication of usurped ownership.

As I read more books about the time when this part of Africa was opened up,¹⁶ not much more than fifty years before, I found Old Chief Mshlanga had been a famous man, known to all the explorers and prospectors. But then he had been young; or maybe it was his father or uncle they spoke of - I never found out.

During that year I met him several times in the part of the farm that was traversed by natives moving over the country. I learned that the path up the side of the big redfield where the birds sang was the recognized highway for migrants. Perhaps I even haunted it in the hope of meeting him: being greeted by him, the exchange of courtesies, seemed to answer the questions that troubled me.

Soon I carried a gun in a different spirit; I used it for shooting food and not to give me confidence. And now the dogs learned better manners. When I saw a native approaching; we offered and took greetings; and slowly that other landscape in my mind faded, and my feet struck directly on the African soil, and I saw the shapes of tree and hill clearly, and the black people moved back, as it were, out of my life; it was as if I stood aside to watch a slow intimate dance of landscape and men, a very old dance, whose steps I could not learn.

But I thought: this is my heritage, too; I was bred here; it is my country as well as the black man's country; and there is plenty of room for all of us, without elbowing each other off the pavements and roads.

It seemed it was only necessary to let free that respect I felt when I was talking with old Chief Mshlanga, to let both black and white people meet gently, with tolerance for each other's differences: it seemed quite easy.

Then, one day, something new happened. Working in our house as servants were always three natives: cook, houseboy, garden boy. They used to change as the farm natives changed: staying for a few months, then moving on

to a new job, or back home to their kraals.¹⁷ They were thought of as "good" or "bad" natives; which meant: how did they behave as servants? Were they lazy, efficient, obedient, or disrespectful? If the family felt good-humoured, the phrase was: "What can you expect from raw, black savages?" If we were angry, we said: "These damned niggers,¹⁸ we would be much better off without them!"

One day, a white policeman was on his rounds of the district, and said laughingly: "Did you know you have an important man in your kitchen?"

"What?" exclaimed my mother sharply. "What do you mean?"

"A Chief's son." The policeman seemed amused.

"He'll boss the tribe when the old man dies."

"He'd better not put on a Chief's son act with me",¹⁹ said my mother.

When the policeman left, we looked with different eyes at our cook: he was a good worker, but he drank too much at week-ends - that was how we knew him.

He was a tall youth, with very black skin, like black polished metal, his tightly-growing black hair parted in white man's fashion at one side, with a metal comb from the store stuck into it; very polite, very distant, very quick to obey an order. Now it had been pointed out, we said: "Of course, you can see. Blood always tells."²⁰

My mother became strict with him now she knew about his birth and prospects. Sometimes, when she lost her temper, she would say: "You aren't the Chief yet, you know." And he would answer her very quietly, his eyes on the ground: "Yes Nkosikaas."

One afternoon he asked for a whole day off, instead of the customary half-day, to go home next Sunday.

"How can you go home in one day?"

"It will take me half an hour on my bicycle," he explained.

I watched the direction he took; and next day I went

off to look for this kraal; I understood he must be Chief Mshlanga's successor: there was no other kraal near enough our farm.

Beyond our boundaries on that side the country was new to me. I followed unfamiliar paths past kopjes that till now had been part of the jagged horizon, hazed with distance. This was Government land,²¹ which had never been cultivated by white men; at first I could not understand why it was that it appeared, in merely crossing the boundary, I had entered a completely fresh type of landscape. It was a wide green valley, where a small river sparkled, and vivid waterbirds darted over the rushes. The grass was thick and soft to my calves, the trees stood tall and shapely.

I was used to our farm, whose hundreds of acres of harsh eroded soil bore trees that had been cut for the mine furnaces and had grown thin and twisted, where the cattle had dragged the grass flat, leaving innumerable criss-crossing trails that deepened each season into gullies under the force of the rains.

This country had been left untouched, save for prospectors whose picks had struck a few sparks from the surface of the rocks as they wandered by; and for migrant natives whose passing had left, perhaps, a charred patch on the trunk of a tree where their evening fire had nestled.

It was very silent: a hot morning with pigeons cooing throatily, the midday shadows lying dense and thick with clear yellow spaces of sunlight between and in all that wide green park-like valley, not a human soul but myself.

I was listening to the quick regular tapping of a woodpecker when slowly a chill feeling seemed to grow up from the small of my back to my shoulders, in a constricting spasm like a shudder, and at the roots of my hair a tingling sensation began and ran down over the surface of

my flesh, leaving me goose-fleshed and cold, though I was damp with sweat. Fever? I thought; then uneasily turned to look over my shoulder; and realized suddenly that this was fear. It was extraordinary, even humiliating. It was a new fear. For all the years I had walked by myself over this country I had never known a moment's uneasiness; in the beginning because I had been supported by a gun and the dogs, then because I had learnt an easy friendliness for the natives I might encounter.

I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind. You look at groves of entwined trees, and picture the animals that might be lurking there; you look at the river, running slowly, dropping from level to level through the vlei, spreading into pools where at night the buck²² come to drink, and the crocodiles rise and drag them by their soft noses into underwater caves. Fear possessed me. I found I was turning round and round, because of that shapeless menace behind me that might reach out and take me. I kept glancing at the files of kopjes which, seen from a different angle, seemed to change with every step so that even known landmarks, like a big mountain that has sentinelled my world since I first became conscious of it, showed an unfamiliar sunlit valley among its foothills. I did not know where I was. I was lost. Panic seized me. I found I was spinning round and round, staring anxiously at this tree and that, peering up at the sun which appeared to have moved into an eastern slant, shedding the sad yellow light of sunset. Hours must have passed! I looked at my watch and found that this state of meaningless terror had lasted perhaps ten minutes.

The point was that it was meaningless. I was not ten miles from home: I had only to take my way back along the valley to find myself at the fence; away among the foot hills of the kopjes gleamed the roof of a neighbour's house, and a couple of hours walking would reach it. This was the sort of fear that contracts the flesh of a dog at night and sets him howling at the full moon. It had nothing to do with what I thought or felt; and I was more disturbed by the fact that I could become its victim than of the physical sensation itself: I walked steadily on, quietened, in a divided mind,²³ watching my own pricking nerves and apprehensive glances from side to side with a disgusted amusement. Deliberately I set myself to think of this village I was seeking, and what I should do when I entered it - if I could find it, which was doubtful, since I was walking aimlessly and it might be anywhere in the hundreds of thousands of acres of bush that stretched about me. With my mind on that village, I realized that a new sensation was added to the fear: loneliness. Now such a terror of isolation invaded me that I could hardly walk; and if it were not that I came over the crest of a small rise and saw a village below me, I should have turned and gone home. It was a cluster of thatched huts in a clearing among trees. There were neat patches of mealies and pumpkins and millet, and cattle grazed under some trees at a distance. Fowls scratched among the huts, dogs lay sleeping on the grass, and goats friezed a kopje that jutted up beyond a tributary of the river lying like an enclosing arm round the village.

As I came close I saw the huts were lovingly decorated with patterns of yellow and red and ochre mud on the walls; and the thatch was tied in place with plaits of straw.

This was not at all like our farm compound, a dirty and neglected place, a temporary home for migrants who had no roots in it.

And now I did not know what to do next. I called a small black boy, who was sitting on a log playing a stringed gourd, quite naked except for the strings of blue beads round his neck, and said: "Tell the Chief I am here." The child stuck his thumb in his mouth and stared shyly back at me.

For minutes I shifted my feet on the edge of what seemed a deserted village, till at last the child scuttled off, and then some women came. They were draped in bright cloths, with brass glinting in their ears and on their arms. They also stared, silently; then turned to chatter among themselves.

I said again: "Can I see Chief Mshlanga?" I saw they caught the name; they did not understand what I wanted. I did not understand myself.

At last I walked through them and came past the huts and saw a clearing under a big shady tree, where a dozen old men sat cross-legged on the ground, talking. Chief Mshlanga was leaning back against the tree, holding a gourd in his hand, from which he had been drinking. When he saw me, not a muscle of his face moved, and I could see he was not pleased: perhaps he was afflicted with my own shyness, due to being unable to find the right forms of courtesy for the occasion. To meet me, on our own farm, was one thing; but I should not have come here. What had I expected? I could not join them socially: the thing was unheard of. Bad enough that I, a white girl, should be walking the veld alone as a white man might: and in this part of the bush where only Government officials had the right to move.

Again I stood, smiling foolishly, while behind me stood the groups of brightly-clad, chattering women, their faces alert with curiosity and interest, and in front of me sat the old men, with old lined faces, their eyes guarded, aloof. It was a village of ancients and children and women. Even the two young men who kneeled beside the Chief were not those I had seen with him previously: The

young men were all away working on the white men's farms and mines, and the Chief must depend on relatives who were temporarily on holiday for his attendants.

"The small white Nkosikaas is far from home," remarked the old man at last.

"Yes," I agreed, "it is far," I wanted to say: "I have come to pay you a friendly visit, Chief Mshlanga." "I could not say it. I might now be feeling an urgent helpless desire to get to know these men and women as people, to be accepted by them as a friend, but the truth was I had set out in a spirit of curiosity: I had wanted to see the village that one day our cook, the reserved and obedient young man who got drunk on Sundays, would one day rule over.

"The child of Nkoss Jordan is welcome," said Chief Mshlanga.

"Thank you", I said, and could think of nothing more to say. There was a silence, while the flies rose and began to buzz around my head: and the wind shook a little in the thick green tree that spread its branches over the old men.

"Good morning", I said at last. "I have to return now to my home."

"Morning, little Nkosikaas," said Chief Mshlanga.

I walked away from the indifferent village, over the rise past the staring amber-eyed goats, down through the tall stately trees into the great rich green valley where the river meandered and the pigeons cooed tales of plenty and the woodpecker tapped softly.

The fear had gone; the loneliness had set into stiff-necked stoicism; there was now a queer hostility in the landscape, a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me, as strong as a wall, as intangible as smoke; it seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer. I went slowly homewards, with an empty heart: I had learned that if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog,²⁴

neither can one dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling; saying: I could not help it, I am also a victim.

I only saw Chief Mshlanga once again.

One night my father's big red land was trampled down by small sharp hooves, and it was discovered that the culprits were goats from Chief Mshlanga's kraal. This had happened once before, years ago.

My father confiscated all the goats. Then he sent a message to the old Chief that if he wanted them he would have to pay for the damage.

He arrived at our house at the time of sunset one evening, looking very old and bent now, walking stiffly under his regally-draped blanket, leaning on a big stick. My father sat himself down in his big chair below the steps on the house; the old man squatted carefully on the ground before him, flanked by his two young men.

The palaver was long and painful, because of the bad English of the young man who interpreted, and because my father could not speak dialect, but only kitchen kaffir.²⁵

From my father's point of view, at least two hundred pounds worth of damage had been done to the crop. He knew he could not get the money from the old man. He felt he was entitled to keep the goats. As for the old Chief, he kept repeating angrily: "Twenty goats! My people cannot lose twenty goats! We are not rich, like the Hkosi Jordan, to lose twenty goats at once."

My father did not think of himself as rich, but rather as very poor. He spoke quickly and angrily in return, saying that the damage done meant a great deal to him, and that he was entitled to the goats.

At last it grew so heated that the cook, the Chief's son, was called from the kitchen to be interpreter, and now my father spoke fluently in English, and our cook translated rapidly so that the old man could understand how very angry my father was. The young man spoke without

emotion, in a mechanical way, his eyes lowered, but showing how he felt his position by a hostile uncomfortable set of the shoulders.

It was now in the late sunset, the sky a welter of colours, the birds singing their last song, and the cattle, lowing peacefully, moving past us towards their sheds for the night. It was the hour when Africa is most beautiful; and here was this pathetic, ugly scene, doing no one any good.

At last my father stated finally: "I'm not going to argue about it. I am keeping the goats."

The old Chief flashed back in his own language: "That means that my people will go hungry when the dry season comes."

"Go to the police then," said my father, and looked triumphant.

There was, of course, no more to be said.

The old man sat silent, his head bent, his hands dangling helplessly over his withered knees. Then he rose, the young men helping him, and he stood facing my father. He spoke once again, very stiffly; and turned away and went home to his village.

"What did he say?" asked my father of the young man, who laughed uncomfortably and would not meet his eyes.

"What did he say?" insisted my father.

Our cook stood straight and silent, his brows knotted together. Then he spoke. "My father says: All this land, this land you call yours, is his land, and belongs to our people."

Having made this statement, he walked off into the bush after his father; and we did not see him again.

Our next cook was a migrant from Nyasaland,²⁶ with no expectations of greatness.

Next time the policeman came on his rounds he was told this story. He remarked: "That kraal has no right, to be there; it should have been moved long ago. I

don't know why no one has done anything about it. I'll have a chat with the Native Commissioner²⁷ next week. I'm going over for tennis on Sunday, anyway."

Some time later we heard that Chief Mshlanga and his people had been moved two hundred miles east, to a proper native reserve,²⁸ the Government land was going to be opened up for white settlement soon.

I went to see the village again, about a year afterwards. There was nothing there. Mounds of red mud, where the huts had been, had long swathes of rotting thatch over them, veined with the red galleries of the white ants. The pumpkin vines rioted everywhere, over the bushes, up the lower branches of trees so that the great golden balls rolled underfoot and dangled overhead: it was a festival of pumpkins. The bushes were crowding up,²⁹ the new grass sprang vivid green.

The settler lucky enough to be allotted the lush warm valley (if he chose to cultivate this particular section) would find, suddenly, in the middle of a mealie field, the plants were growing fifteen feet tall, the weight of the cobs dragging at the stalks, and wonder what unsuspected vein of richness he had struck.

* * * * *

Proper Names

Africa	/ʼæ frikə /
Johannesburg	/d ʒ o(u) ʼhæ nisbɜ:g /
Jordan	/ʼd ʒ ɔ :dn /
Mshlanga	/ʼm ʃ lɔ ŋ gɔ /
Nyasaland	/h j ɛ s ə l ə nd /

Explanatory Notes

1. ... the bush - an area of wild uncultivated country covered with bushes (especially in Africa).
2. "Out flew the web and floated wide, the mirror crack'd from side to side..." - a quotation from the poem "The Lady of Shalote" by Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892). The reference to..." "a pale willowed river, a pale gleaming castle" is also taken from the same poem.
3. ... veined with sunlight - the veins of leaves are clearly seen in sunlight.
4. ... red-starred witchweed - a parasite plant with red star-like blossoms in South Africa.
5. ... the msasa trees - a kind of tree growing in South Africa.
6. ... the swing of the seasons - the change of seasons.
7. ... for what they were - ... what they were really like.
8. ... the veld ... - treeless land covered with grass and extending over large areas in South Africa (the word comes from Afrikaans i.e. the South-African variant of the Dutch language).
9. ... Bass - the incorrect pronunciation of the word "baas" meaning "boss, master" in Afrikaans.
10. ... Johannesburg - the largest city in the Transvaal, the centre of gold mining in S. Africa.
11. ... Nkosikaas - female-chief of a Negro tribe (from the Kaffir language) cf. Nkosi (Nkoss)-chief.
12. ... vlei - a hollow in which water collects during rainy seasons (from Afrikaans).
13. ... kopje - a small hill (from Afrikaans).

14. kaffir - a member of the Bantu race in South-Africa.
15. ... to make a buffoon of him - to mock him
16. ... when this part of Africa was opened up - ... when this part of Africa was invaded by the whites.
17. ... kraal - a South-African village of huts enclosed with a fence.
18. ... niggers (pejoratively used) - Negroes.
19. "He'd better not put on a chief's son act with me" -
He had better not behave as a chief's son with me.
20. "Blood always tells" - Social origin always makes itself felt.
21. This was Government land - land belonging to the state.
22. ... the buck - antelopes (here the generic singular is used).
23. ... in a divided mind - hesitatingly.
24. ... if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog (fig.) - if one cannot make a country obedient like a dog ...
25. ... kitchen kaffir - the broken kaffir language used by the whites when speaking to native servants.
26. Nyasaland - then: the protectorate of Great Britain in South-East Africa. now: a part of the Malawi Republic
27. ... the Native Commissioner - a government representative dealing with any kind of problems concerning the native inhabitants.
28. ... native reserve - an area for the native people to live in (usually the worst and least fertile areas of the country).
29. ... the bushes were crowding up - the bushes were spreading everywhere.

A CUP OF TEA

Katherine Mansfield

1888 - 1923

Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces.¹ ... But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and ... artists - quaint creatures, discoveries of hers, some of them too terrifying for words, but others quite presentable and amusing.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a duck of a boy.² No, not Peter- Michael. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well off, which is odious and stuffy and sounds like one's grandparents.³ But if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street.⁴ If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that perfect shop in Regent Street,⁵ and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said: "I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape." The attendant bowed and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. "Give me those stumpy little tulips. Those red and white ones." And she was followed to the car by a thin shop-girl staggering under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes. ...

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street.⁶ It was a shop she

liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something ...

"You see, madam," he would explain in his low respectful tones, "I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare. ..." And breathing deeply, he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale fingertips.

To-day it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms round his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud like a watchful cherub floating above their heads. Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing how charming her hands were against the blue velvet. The shopman, in some dim cavern of his mind, may have dared to think so too. For he took a pencil, leant over the counter, and his pale bloodless fingers crept timidly towards those rosy, flashing ones, as he murmured gently: "If I may venture to point out to madam, the flowers on the little lady's bodice."

"Charming!" Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. "Twenty-eight guineas,⁷ madam."

"Twenty-eight guineas." Rosemary gave no sign.⁸ She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich... She looked vague.⁹ She stared at a plump tea-kettle like a plump hen above the shopman's head, and her voice was dreamy as she answered: "Well, keep it for me - will you? I'll..."

But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them.¹⁰ One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea.¹¹ But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy - where had she come from? - was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

"M-madam," stammered the voice. "Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

"A cup of tea?" There was something simple, sincere

in that voice; it wasn't in the least the voice of a beggar. "Then have you no money at all?" asked Rosemary.

"None, madam," came the answer.

"How extraordinary!" Rosemary peered through the dusk and the girl gazed back at her. How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things¹² she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: "I simply took her home with me," as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: "Come home to tea with me."

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. "I mean it," she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. "Why won't you? Do. Come home with me now in my car and have tea."

"You- you don't mean it, madam," said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

"But I do," cried Rosemary. "I want you to. To please me. Come along."

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes devoured Rosemary. "You're - you're not taking me to the police station?" she stammered.

"The police station!" Rosemary laughed out. "Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear anything you care to tell me."

Hungry people are easily led.¹³ The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were skimming through the dusk.

"There!" said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, "Now I've got you," as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it

kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that - wonderful things did happen in life, that - fairy godmothers were real, that - rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters. She turned impulsively, saying: "Don't be frightened. After all, why shouldn't you come back with me? We're both women. If I'm the more fortunate, you ought to expect..."

But happily at that moment, for she didn't know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the rich little girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.

"Come, come upstairs," said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. "Come up to my room." And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants; she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring to Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great thing was to be natural!

And "There!" cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful lacquer furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn't mind that.

"Come and sit down," she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, "in this comfy¹" chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold."

"I daren't, madam," said the girl, and she edged backwards.

"Oh, please," - Rosemary ran forward - "you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't, really. Sit down when I've taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have

tea and be cosy. Why are you afraid?" And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn't acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying: "Won't you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfortable without a hat isn't one?"

There was a whisper that sounded like: "Very good, madam," and the crushed hat was taken off.

"And let me help you off with your coat, too," said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull. It was quite an effort. The other scarcely helped her at all. She seemed to stagger like a child, and the thought came and went through Rosemary's mind, that if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed. And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat too. She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall go off,¹⁵ madam, if I don't have something."

"Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!" Rosemary rushed to the bell.

"Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!"

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: "No, I don't want no brandy.¹⁶ I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam." And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

"Don't cry, poor little thing," she said. "Don't cry." And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She

really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, birdlike shoulders.

Now, at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: "I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself.¹⁷ I can't bear no more."

"You shan't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. Do stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please!"

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of sweet languor, looking at the blaze. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

"And when did you have your last meal?" she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

"Rosemary, may I come in?" It was Philip.

"Of course."

He came in. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said, and stopped and stared.

"It's quite all right," said Rosemary, smiling. "This is my friend, Miss -"

"Smith, madam," said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

"Smith", said Rosemary. "We are going to have a little talk."

"Oh yes," said Philip. "Quite," and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. "It's a beastly afternoon," he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Rosemary enthusiastically.

"Vile."

Philip smiled his charming smile. "As a matter of fact," said he, "I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?"

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her: "Of course she will." And they went out of the room together.

"I say," said Philip, when they were alone. "Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?"

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: "I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She's a real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me."

"But what on earth are you going to do with her?" cried Philip.

"Be nice to her," said Rosemary quickly. "Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her - treat her make her feel -"

"My darling girl," said Philip, "you're quite mad, you know. It simply can't be done."

"I knew you'd say that," retorted Rosemary. "Why not? I want to. Isn't that a reason? And besides, one's always reading about these things. I decided -"

"But," said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, "She's so astonishingly pretty."

"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed.

"Do you think so? I - I hadn't thought about it."

"Good Lord!" Philip struck a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over¹⁸ when I came into your room just now. However ... I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up The Milliner's Gazette."¹⁹

"You absurd creature!" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque-book towards her. But no, cheques would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

"I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze, "Miss Smith won't dine with us to-night."

Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?"²⁰

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," said she, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks.

"Do you like me?" said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

"I like you awfully," he said, and he held her tighter. "Kiss me."

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily: "I saw a fascinating little box to-day. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?"

Philip jumped her on his knee. "You may, little wasteful one," said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

"Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, "am I pretty?"

* * * * *

Proper Names

Bond Street	/'bʌnd stri:t/
Curzon Street	/'kʌ:zn stri:t/
Jeanne	/ʒæn/
Paris	/'pæris/
Philip	/'filip/
Regent Street	/'ri:dʒ(ə)nt stri:t/
Rosemary Fell	/'rouzm(ə)ri 'fel/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... if you took her to pieces ... (fig.) - if you studied her in detail.
2. ... a duck of a boy - a very dear boy.
3. ... and sounds like one's grandparents - and sounds very old-fashioned.
4. ... Bond Street - a London street with many fashion houses and jeweller's shops.
5. ... Regent Street - a busy street in London with various big shops.
6. ... Curzon Street - a street in the aristocratic West End of London where the richer and more fashionable people live, where the best shops, hotels, theatres, etc. are to be found.

7. Twenty-eight guineas - i.e. 588 shillings (guinea - 21 shillings; former gold coin, now money of account, used in stating professional fees, prices of pictures, horses, jewellery, etc.).
8. Rosemary gave no sign - Rosemary did not respond.
9. She looked vague - She seemed to be uncertain.
10. One oughtn't to give way to them - one ought to master one's feelings at such moments.
11. ... an extra-special tea - a very strong tea
12. ... she did do one of those things - she really did one of those things (the auxiliary verb "do" is used emphatically here).
13. Hungry people are easily led - It is easy to influence hungry people.
14. ... comfy (colloq.) - comfortable.
15. "I shall go off" - I shall faint.
16. "I don't want no brandy" - I don't want any brandy (Double negation is very often used in uneducated speech).
17. "I shall do away with myself" - I shall kill myself.
18. "I was bowled over" - I was very surprised.
19. The Milliner's Gazette - a milliners' magazine.
20. "Previous engagement?" - Did she have a previous engagement?

THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF

O. Henry

1802 - 1910

It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you. We were down South, in Alabama¹ - Bill Driscoll and myself - when this kidnapping idea struck us. It was, as Bill afterwards expressed it, "during a moment of temporary mental apparition"; but we didn't find that out till later.

There was a town down there, as flat as a flannel-cake, and called Summit, of course. It contained inhabitants of as undeletericus and self-satisfied a class of peasantry as ever clustered around a Maypole.²

Bill and me had a joint capital of about six hundred dollars, and we needed just two thousand dollars more to pull off a fraudulent town-lot scheme in Western Illinois with. We talked it over on the front steps of the hotel. Philoprogenitiveness, says we,³ is strong in semi-rural communities; therefore, and for other reasons, a kidnapping project ought to do better there than in the radius of newspapers that send reporters out in plain clothes to stir up talk about such things. We knew that Summit couldn't get after us with anything stronger than constables and, maybe, some lackadaisical bloodhounds and a diatribe or two in the Weekly Farmer's Budget. So, it looked good.

We selected for our victim the only child of a prominent citizen named Ebenezer Dorset. The father was respectable and tight,⁴ a mortgage fancier⁵ and a stern, up-right collection-plate passer and forecloser.⁶ The kid was a boy of ten, with bas-relief freckles,⁷ and hair the color of the cover of the magazine you buy at the newsstand when you want to catch a train.⁸ Bill and me figured that Ebenezer would melt down for a ransom of two

thousand dollars to a cent.⁹ But wait till I tell you.

About two miles from Summit was a little mountain, covered with a dense cedar brake. On the rear elevation of this mountain was a cave. There we stored provisions.

One evening after sundown, we drove in a buggy past old Dorset's house. The kid was in the street, throwing rocks at a kitten on the opposite fence.

"Hey, little boy!" says Bill, "would you like to have a bag of candy and a nice ride?"

The boy catches Bill neatly in the eye with a piece of brick.

"That will cost the old man an extra five hundred dollars," says Bill, climbing over the wheel.

That boy put up a fight like a welter-weight cinnamon bear,¹⁰ but, at last, we got him down in the bottom of the buggy and drove away. We took him up to the cave, and I hitched the horse in the cedar brake. After dark I drove the buggy to the little village, three miles away, where we had hired it, and walked back to the mountain.

Bill was pasting court-plaster over the scratches and bruises on his features. There was a fire burning behind the big rock at the entrance of the cave, and the boy was watching a pot of boiling coffee, with two buzzard tail-feathers stuck in his red hair. He points a stick at me when I come up, and says:

"Ha! cursed paleface, do you dare to enter the camp of Red Chief, the terror of the plains?"

"He's all right now," says Bill, rolling up his trousers and examining some bruises on his shins. "We're playing Indian. We're making Buffalo Bill's show look like magic-lantern views of Palestine in the town hall. I'm Old Hank, the Trapper, Red Chief's captive, and I'm to be scalped at daybreak. By Geronimo! that kid can kick hard."

Yes, sir, that boy seemed to be having the time of his life. The fun of camping out in a cave had made him

forget that he was a captive himself. He immediately christened me Snake-eye, the Spy, and announced that, when his braves returned from the warpath, I was to be broiled at the stake at the rising of the sun.

Then we had supper; and he filled his mouth full of bacon and bread and gravy, and began to talk. He made a during dinner speech something like this:

"I like this fine. I never camped out before; but I had a pet 'possum once, and I was nine last birthday. I hate to go to school. Rats ate up sixteen of Jimmy Talbot's aunt's speckled hen's eggs. Are there any real Indians in these woods? I want some more gravy. Does the trees moving make the wind blow? We had five puppies. What makes your nose so red, Hank? My father has lots of money. Are the stars hot? I whipped Ed Walker twice, ¹¹ Saturday, I don't like girls. You dassent catch toads unless with a string. Do oxen make any noise? Why are oranges round? Have you got beds to sleep on in this cave? Amos Murray has got six toes. A parrot can talk, but a monkey or a fish can't. How many does it take to make twelve?"

Every few minutes he would remember that he was a pesky redskin, ¹² and pick up his stick rifle and tiptoe to the mouth of the cave to rubber ¹³ for the scouts of the hated paleface. Now and then he would let out a war-whoop that made Old Hank the Trapper shiver. That boy had Bill terrorized from the start.

"Red Chief," says I to the kid, "would you like to go home?"

"Ah, what for?" says he. "I don't have any fun at home. I hate to go to school. I like to camp out. You won't take me back home again, Snake-eye, will you?"

"Not right away," says I. "We'll stay here in the cave awhile."

"All right!" says he. "That'll be fine. I never had such fun in all my life."

We went to bed about eleven o'clock. We spread down some wide blankets and quilts and put Red Chief between us. We weren't afraid he'd run away. He kept us awake for three hours, jumping up and reaching for his rifle and screeching: "Hist! pard," in mine and Bill's ears, as the fancied crackle of a twig or the rustle of a leaf revealed to his young imagination the stealthy approach of the outlaw band. At last, I fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed that I had been kidnapped and chained to a tree by a ferocious pirate with red hair.

Just at daybreak, I was awakened by a series of awful screams from Bill. They weren't yells, or howls, or shouts, or whoops, or yawns, such as you'd expect from a manly set of vocal organs - they were simply indecent, terrifying, humiliating screams, such as women emit when they see ghosts or caterpillars. It's an awful thing to hear a strong, desperate, fat man scream incontinently in a cave at daybreak.

I jumped up to see what the matter was. Red Chief was sitting on Bill's chest, with one hand twined in Bill's hair. In the other he had the sharp case-knife we used for slicing bacon; and he was industriously and realistically trying to take Bill's scalp, according to the sentence that had been pronounced upon him the evening before.

I got the knife away from the kid and made him lie down again. But from that moment, Bill's spirit was broken. He laid down on his side of the bed, but he never closed an eye again in sleep as long as that boy was with us. I dozed off for a while, but along toward sun-up I remembered that Red Chief had said I was to be burned at the stake at the rising of the sun. I wasn't nervous or afraid; but I sat up and lit my pipe and leaned against a rock.

"What you getting up so soon for, Sam?" asked Bill.

"Me?" says I. "Oh, I got a kind of pain in my shoulder. I thought sitting up would rest it."

"You're a liar!" says Bill. "You're afraid. You was to be burned at sunrise, and you was afraid he'd do it. And he would, too, if he could find a match. Ain't it awful, Sam? Do you think anybody will pay out money to get a little imp like that back home?"

"Sure," said I. "A rowdy kid like that is just the kind that parents dote on. Now, you and the Chief get up and cook breakfast, while I go up on the top of this mountain and reconnoitre."

I went up on the peak of the little mountain and ran my eye over the contiguous vicinity. Over towards Summit I expected to see the sturdy yeomanry of the village armed with scythes and pitchforks beating the countryside for the dastardly kidnappers. But what I saw was a peaceful landscape dotted with one man ploughing with a dun mule. Nobody was dragging the creek; no couriers dashed hither and yon,¹⁴ bringing tidings of no news to the distracted parents. There was a sylvan attitude of somnolent sleepiness pervading that section of the external outward surface of Alabama that lay exposed to my view. "Perhaps," says I to myself, "it has not yet been discovered that the wolves have borne away the tender lambkin from the fold. Heaven help the wolves!" says I, and I went down the mountain to breakfast.

When I got to the cave I found Bill backed up against the side of it, breathing hard, and the boy threatening to smash him with a rock half as big as a cocoanut.

"He put a red-hot boiled potato down my back," explained Bill, "and then mashed it with his foot; and I boxed his ears. Have you got a gun about you, Sam?"

I took the rock away from the boy and kind of patched up the argument.¹⁵ "I'll fix you,"¹⁶ says the kid to Bill. "No man ever yet struck the Red Chief but he got paid for it. You better beware!"

After breakfast the kid takes a piece of leather with strings wrapped around it out of his pocket and goes out-

side the cave unwinding it.

"What's he up to now?" says Bill, anxiously. "You don't think he'll run away, do you, Sam?"

"No fear of it," says I. "He don't seem to be¹⁷ much of a home body. But we've got to fix up some plan about the ransom. There don't seem to be much excitement around Summit on account of his disappearance; but maybe they haven't realized yet that he's gone. His folks may think he's spending the night with Aunt Jane or one of the neighbors. Anyhow, he'll be missed to-day. To-night we must get a message to his father demanding the two thousand dollars for his return."

Just then we heard a kind of war-whoop, such as David might have emitted when he knocked out the champion Goliath. It was a sling that Red Chief had pulled out of his pocket, and he was whirling it around his head.

I dodged, and heard a heavy thud and a kind of a sigh from Bill, like a horse gives out when you take his saddle off. A niggerhead rock the size of an egg had caught Bill just behind his left ear. He loosened himself all over and fell in the fire across the frying pan of hot water for washing the dishes. I dragged him out and poured cold water on his head for half an hour.

By and by, Bill sits up and feels behind his ear and says: "Sam, do you know who my favorite Biblical character is?"

"Take it easy," says I. "You'll come to your senses presently."

"King Herod,"¹⁸ says he, "You won't go away and leave me here alone, will you, Sam?"

I went out and caught that boy and shook him until his freckles rattled.

"If you don't behave," says I, "I'll take you straight home. Now, are you going to be good, or not?"

"I was only funning," says he, sullenly. "I didn't mean to hurt Old Hank. But what did he hit me for? I'll

behave, Snake-eye, if you won't send me home, and if you'll let me play the Black Scout to-day."

"I don't know the game," says I, "That's for you and Mr. Bill to decide. He's your playmate for the day. I'm going away for a while, on business. Now, you come in and make friends with him and say you are sorry for hurting him, or home you go, at once."

I made him and Bill shake hands, and then I took Bill aside and told him I was going to Poplar Cove, a little village three miles from the cave, and find out what I could about how the kidnapping had been regarded in Summit. Also, I thought it best to send a peremptory letter to old man Dorset, that day, demanding the ransom and dictating how it should be paid.

"You know, Sam," says Bill, "I've stood by you without batting an eye in earthquakes, fire and flood - in poker games, dynamite outrages,¹⁹ police raids, train robberies, and cyclones. I never lost my nerve yet till we kidnapped that two-legged skyrocket of a kid. He's got me going.²⁰ You won't leave me long with him, will you, Sam?"

"I'll be back some time this afternoon," says I. "You must keep the boy amused and quiet till I return. And now we'll write the letter to old Dorset."

Bill and I got paper and pencil and worked on the letter while Red Chief, with a blanket wrapped around him, strutted up and down, guarding, the mouth of the cave. Bill begged me tearfully to make the ransom fifteen hundred dollars instead of two thousand. "I ain't attempting," says he, "to decry the celebrated moral aspect of parental affection, but we're dealing with humans, and it ain't human for anybody to give up two thousand dollars for that forty-pound chunk of freckled wild-cat. I'm willing to take a chance at fifteen hundred dollars. You can charge the difference up to me."

So, to relieve Bill, I acceded, and we collaborated a letter that ran this way:

EBENEZER DORSET, Esq.: 21

We have your boy concealed in a place far from Summit. It is useless for you or the most skilful detectives to attempt to find him. Absolutely, the only terms on which you can have him restored to you are these: We demand fifteen hundred dollars in large bills for his return; the money to be left at midnight to-night at the same spot and in the same box as your reply - as hereinafter described. If you agree to these terms, send your answer in writing by a solitary messenger to-night at half-past eight o'clock. After crossing Owl Creek on the road to Poplar Grove, there are three large trees about a hundred yards apart, close to the fence of the wheat field on the right-hand side. At the bottom of the fence-post, opposite the third tree, will be found a small pasteboard box.

The messenger will place the answer in this box and return immediately to Summit.

If you attempt any treachery or fail to comply with our demand as stated, you will never see your boy again.

If you pay the money as demanded, he will be returned to you safe and well within three hours. These terms are final, and if you do not accede to them no further communication will be attempted.

Two Desperate Men.

I addressed this letter to Dorset, and put it in my pocket. As I was about to start, the kid comes up to me and says:

"Aw, Snake-eye, you said I could play the Black-Scout while you was gone."

"Play it, of course," says I. "Mr. Bill will play with you. What kind of a game is it?"

"I'm the Black Scout," says Red Chief, "and I have to ride to the stockade to warn the settlers that the Indians are coming. I'm tired of playing Indian myself. I want to be the Black Scout."

"All right," says I. "It sounds harmless to me.¹ I guess Mr. Bill will help you foil the pesky savages."

"What am I to do?" asks Bill, looking at the kid suspiciously.

"You are the hoss,"²² says Black Scout, "Get down on your hands and knees. How can I ride to the stockade without a hoss?"

"You'd better keep him interested," said I, "till we get the scheme going. Loosen up."²³

Bill gets down on his all fours, and a look comes in his eye like a rabbit's when you catch it in a trap.

"How far is it to the stockade, kid?" he asks, in a husky manner of voice.

"Ninety miles," says the Black Scout, "And you have to hump yourself to get there on time. Whoa, now?"

The Black Scout jumps on Bill's back and digs his heels in his side.

"For Heaven's sake," says Bill, "hurry back, Sam, as soon as you can. I wish we hadn't made the ransom more than a thousand. Say, you quit kicking me or I'll get up and warn you good."

I walked over to Poplar Cove and sat around the post-office and store, talking with the chaw-bacons that came in to trade. One whiskerando²⁴ says that he hears Summit is all upset on account of Elder Ebenezer Dorset's boy having been lost or stolen. That was all I wanted to know. I bought some smoking tobacco, referred casually to the price of black-eyed peas, posted my letter surreptitiously, and came away. The postmaster said the mail-carrier would come by in an hour to take the mail on to Summit.

When I got back to the cave Bill and the boy were not to be found. I explored the vicinity of the cave, and risked a yodel or two, but there was no response.

So I lighted my pipe and sat down on a mossy bank to await developments.

In about half an hour I heard the bushes rustle, and Bill wobbled out into the little glade in front of the cave. Behind him was the kid, stepping softly like a scout, with a broad grin on his face. Bill stopped, took off his hat, and wiped his face with a red handkerchief. The kid stopped about eight feet behind him.

"Sam," says Bill, "I suppose you'll think I'm a renegade, but I couldn't help it. I'm a grown person with masculine proclivities and habits of self-defense, but there is a time when all systems of egotism and predominance fail. The boy is gone. I sent him home. All is off. There was martyrs in old times," goes on Bill, "that suffered death rather than give up the particular graft they enjoyed. None of 'em ever was subjugated to such supernatural tortures as I have been. I tried to be faithful to our articles of depredation; but there came a limit."

"What's the trouble, Bill?" I asks him.

"I was rode," says Bill, "the ninety miles to the stockade, not barring an inch,²⁵ then, when the settlers was rescued, I was given oats. Sand ain't a palatable substitute. And then, for an hour I had to try to explain to him why there was nothin' in holes, how a road can run both ways, and what makes the grass green. I tell you, Sam, a human can only stand so much, I takes him by the neck of his clothes and drags him down the mountain. On the way he kicks my legs black and blue from the knees down; and I've got to have two or three bites on my thumb and hand cauterized.

"But he's gone" - continues Bill - "gone home, I showed him the road to Summit and kicked him about eight feet nearer there at one kick. I'm sorry we lose the ransom; but it was either that or Bill Driscoll to the mad-house."

Bill is puffing and blowing, but there is a look of ineffable peace and growing content on his rose-pink features.

"Bill," says I, "there isn't any heart disease in your family, is there?"

"No," says Bill, "nothing chronic except malaria and accidents. "Why?"

"Then you might turn around," says I, "and have a look behind you."

Bill turns and sees the boy, and loses his complexion and sits down plump on the ground and begins to pluck aimlessly at grass and little sticks. For an hour I was afraid of his mind. And then I told him that my scheme was to put the whole job through immediately and that we would get the ransom and be off with it by midnight if old Dorset fell in with our proposition. So Bill braced up enough to give the kid a weak sort of a smile and a promise to play the Russian in a Japanese war with him as soon as he felt a little better.

I had a scheme for collecting that ransom without danger of being caught by counterplots that ought to commend itself to professional kidnappers. The tree under which the answer was to be left - and the money later on - was close to the road fence with big, bare fields on all sides. If a gang of constables should be watching for any one to come for the note they could see him a long way off crossing the fields or in the road. But no, sirree!²⁶ At half-past eight I was up in that tree as well hidden as a tree toad, waiting for the messenger to arrive.

Exactly on time, a half-grown boy rides up the road on a bicycle locates the pasteboard box at the foot of the fencepost, slips a folded piece of paper into it and pedals away again back toward Summit.

I waited an hour and then concluded the thing was square.²⁷ I slid down the tree, got the note, slipped along the fence till I struck the woods; and was back at the cave in another half an hour. I opened the note; got near the lantern, and read it to Bill. It was written with a pen in a crabbed hand, and the sum and substance of it was this;

Two Desperate Men.

Gentlemen: I received your letter to-day by post, in regard to the ransom you ask for the return of my son. I think you are a little high in your demands, and I hereby make you a counterproposition, which I am inclined to believe you will accept. You bring Johnny home and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and I agree to take him off your hands. You had better come at night, for the neighbors believe he is lost, and I couldn't be responsible for what they would do to anybody they saw bringing him back. Very respectfully,

Ebenezer Dorset.

"Great pirates of Penzance," says I; "Of all the impudent - "

But I glanced at Bill, and hesitated. He had the most appealing look in his eyes I ever saw on the face of a dumb or a talking brute.

"Sam," says he, "what's two hundred and fifty dollars, after all? We've got the money. One more night of this kid will send me to a bed in Bedlam. Besides being a thorough gentleman, I think Mr. Dorset is a spendthrift for making us such a liberal offer. You ain't going to let the chance go, are you?"

"Tell you the truth, Bill," says I, "this little he ewe lamb has somewhat got on my nerves too. We'll take him home, pay the ransom, and make our get-away,"

We took him home that night. We got him to go by telling him that his father had bought a silver-mounted rifle and a pair of moccasins for him, and we were to hunt bears the next day.

It was just twelve o'clock when we knocked at Ebenezer's front door. Just at the moment when I should have been abstracting the fifteen hundred dollars from the box under the tree, according to the original proposition, Bill was counting out two hundred and fifty dollars into Dorset's hand.

When the kid found out we were going to leave him at home he started up a howl like a calliope and fastened himself as tight as a leech to Bill's leg. His father peeled him away gradually,²⁸ like a porous plaster.

"How long can you hold him?" asks Bill.

"I'm not as strong as I used to be," says old Dorset, "but I think I can promise you ten minutes."

"Enough!" says Bill. "In ten minutes I shall cross the Central, Southern, and Middle Western States, and be legging it trippingly for the Canadian border."²⁹

And, as dark as it was, and as fat as Bill was, and as good a runner as I am, he was a good mile and a half out of Summit before I could catch up with him.

* * * * *

Proper Names

Alabama /æ lə' bæ mæ/
Amos Murray /'eiməs' mæri/
Bill Driscoll /'bil 'drisk(ə)l/
Ebenezer Dorset /'ebi'ni:z ə 'dɔ:sɪt/
Ed Walker /'ed 'wɔ:kə/
Herod /'herəd/
Illinois /,ili'nɔi /
Penance /pen'zʌns/
Sam /sæm/

Explanatory Notes

1. Alabama - a southern state in the USA
2. ... as undeleterious and self-satisfied a class of peasantry as clustered around a Maypole - a crowd of harmless and selfsatisfied country people who gather around a Maypole at the first-of-May celebration
3. ... says we (I) (in ungrammatical speech) - say we (I)

4. The father was respectable and tight - The father was respectable and tight-fisted (stingy)
5. a mortgage fancier - a person who is fond of and supports the mortgage system
6. a stern, upright collection-plate passer and forecloser - here a reference is made to the hypocritical and cruel nature of Ebenezer Dorset (a collection-plate passer is a church official who collects money from people; a forecloser is a money-lender who ends a mortgage by getting legal rights to the property immediately when interest or principal is not paid).
7. ... with bas-relief freckles - with large and conspicuous freckles
8. ... hair the color of the cover of the magazine you buy at the news-stand when you want to catch a train - red hair
9. ... that Ebenezer would melt down for a ransom of two thousand dollars to a cent - that Ebenezer would be ready to pay a ransom of two thousand dollars
10. ... like a welter-weight cinnamon bear - like a heavy reddish-brown bear
11. You dassent catch toads - (ungrammatical spoken English - You do not catch toads
12. ... a pesky redskin - a nasty (troublesome) Indian.
13. ... to rubber for the scouts - to spy on the scouts (to look for the scouts)
14. ... hither and yon ... - hither and thither (here and there)
15. ... patched up the argument - put an end to the argument in a friendly way
16. "I'll fix you" - I'll show you (I'll take revenge on you)

17. "He don't seem to be ..." - (ungrammatical form of uneducated speech) - He does not seem to be ...
(Another example from the text: There don't seem to be ...)
18. "King Herod" ... King of the Jews from 37 to 4 B.C.
19. ... dynamite outrages - some kind of criminal explosions
20. He's got me going - He has made me mad
21. Esq. - esquire, a title of courtesy used chiefly in the address on a letter, placed after the name
22. "You are the hoss" - You are the horse (American fam. speech)
23. "Loosen up" - off you go!
24. One whiskerando - A whiskered man ...
25. ... not barring an inch - not an inch less
26. But no, sirree! (emphatically) - But no, sir!
27. ... the thing was square - it was an honest deal
28. His father peeled him away gradually - His father pulled him away from Bill
29. ... and be legging it trippingly for the Canadian border - ... and will be hurrying (on foot) towards the Canadian border

THE HAPPIEST MAN ON EARTH

Albert Maltz

1908

JESSE felt ready to weep. He had been sitting in the shanty waiting for Tom to appear, grateful for the chance to rest his injured foot, quietly, joyously anticipating the moment, when Tom would say, "Why of course, Jesse, you can start whenever your're ready!"

For two weeks he had been pushing himself, from Kansas City,¹ Missouri,² to Tulsa,³ Oklahoma,⁴ through nights of rain and a week of scorching sun, without sleep or a decent meal, sustained by the vision of that one moment. And then Tom had come into the office. He had come in quickly, holding a sheaf of papers in his hand; he had glanced at Jesse only casually, it was true - but long enough. He had not known him. He had turned away. And Tom Brackett was his brother-in-law.

Was it his clothes? Jesse knew he looked terrible. He had tried to spruce up at a drinking fountain in the park, but even that had gone badly; in his excitement he had cut himself shaving, an ugly gash down the side of his cheek. And nothing could get the red gumbo dust out of his suit even though he had slapped himself till both arms were worn out. ... Or was it just that he had changed so much?

True, they hadn't seen each other for five years; but Tom looked five years older, that was all. He was still Tom. God! was he so different?

Brackett finished his telephone call. He leaned back in his swivel chair and glanced over at Jesse with small, clear blue eyes that were suspicious and unfriendly. He was a heavy, paunchy man of forty-five, auburn-haired,

rather dour looking, his face was meaty, his features pronounced and forceful, his nose somewhat bulbous and reddish-hued at the tip. He looked like a solid, decent capable business man - which he was. He surveyed Jesse with cold indifference, manifestly unwilling to spend time on him. Even the way he chewed his toothpick seemed contemptuous to Jesse.

"Yes?" Brackett said suddenly. "What do you want?"

His voice was decent enough Jesse admitted. He had expected it to be worse. He moved up to the wooden counter that partitioned the shanty. He thrust a hand nervously through his tangled hair.

"I guess you don't recognize me, Tom", he said falteringly, "I'm Jesse Fulton."

"Huh?" Brackett said. That was all.

"Yes, I am, and Ella sends you her love."

Brackett rose and walked over to the counter until they were face to face. He surveyed Fulton incredulously, trying to measure the resemblance to his brother-in-law as he remembered him. This man was tall, about thirty. That fitted! He had straight good features and a lank erect body. That was right too. But the face was too gaunt, the body too spiny under the baggy clothes for him to be sure. His brother-in-law had been a solid, strong young man with muscle and beef to him. It was like looking at a faded, badly taken photograph and trying to recognize the subject: the resemblance was there but the difference was tremendous. He searched the eyes. They at least seemed definitely familiar, gray, with a curiously shy but decent look in them. He had liked that about Fulton.

Jesse stood quiet. Inside he was seething. Brackett was like a man examining a piece of broken-down horse flesh, there was a look of pure pity in his eyes. It made Jesse furious. He knew he wasn't as far gone as all that.

"Yes, I believe you are," Brackett said finally, "but you sure have changed."

"By God, it's a five years, ain't⁵ it?" Jesse said resentfully. "You only saw me a couple of times anyway." Then, to himself, with his lips locked together, in mingled vehemence and shame. What if I have changed? Don't everybody?⁶ I ain't no corpse.⁷

"You was solid looking,"⁸ Brackett continued softly, in the same tone of incredulous wonder. "You lost weight, I guess?"

Jesse kept silent. He needed Brackett too much to risk antagonizing him. But it was only by deliberate effort that he could keep from boiling over. The pause lengthened,⁹ became painful. Brackett flushed. "Jiminy Christmas,⁹ excuse me," he burst out in apology. He jerked the counter up. "Come in. Take a seat. Good God, boy" - he grasped Jesse's hand and shook it - "I am glad to see you; don't think anything else! You just looked so peaked."¹⁰

"It's all right," Jesse murmured. He sat down, thrusting his hand through his curly, tangled hair.

"Why are you limping?"

"I stepped on a stone; it jagged a hole through my shoe," Jesse pulled his feet back under the chair. He was ashamed of his shoes. They had come from the Relief¹¹ originally, and two weeks on the road had about finished them. All morning, with a kind of delicious, foolish solemnity, he had been vowing to himself that before anything else, before even a suit of clothes, he was going to buy himself a brand new strong pair of shoes.

Brackett kept his eyes off Jesse's feet. He knew what was bothering the boy and it filled his heart with pity. The whole thing was appalling. He had never seen anyone who looked more down and out. His sister had been writing to him every week, but she hadn't told him they were as badly off as this.

"Well, now listen," Brackett began, "tell me things. How's Ella?"

"Oh, she's pretty good," Jesse replied absently. He had a soft pleasing, rather shy voice that went with his soft grey eyes. He was worrying over how to get started.

"And the kids?"

"Oh, they're fine ... Well, you know," Jesse added, becoming more attentive, "the young one has to wear a brace.¹² He can't run around, you know. But he's smart. He draws pictures and he does things, you know."

"Yes," Brackett said. "That's good." He hesitated. There was a moment silence. Jesse fidgeted in his chair. Now that the time had arrived, he felt awkward. Brackett leaned forward and put his hand on Jesse's knee, "Ella didn't tell me things were so bad for you, Jesse, I might have helped."

"Well, goodness," Jesse returned softly, "you been having your own troubles, ain't you?"

"Yes," Brackett leaned back. His ruddy face became mournful and darkly bitter. "You know I lost my hardware shop?"

"Well sure, of course," Jesse answered, surprised. "You wrote us. That's what I mean."

"I forgot," Brackett said. "I keep on being surprised over it myself. Not that it was worth much," he added bitterly. "It was running down hill for three years. I guess I just wanted it because it was mine." He laughed pointlessly, without mirth. "Well, tell me about yourself," he asked. "What happened to the job you had?"

Jesse burst out abruptly, with agitation. "Let it wait, Tom, I got something on my mind."

"It ain't you and Ella?" Brackett interrupted anxiously.

"Why no!" Jesse sat back. "Why however did you come to think that? Why Ella and me - " he stopped, laughing. "Why, Tom, I'm just crazy about Ella. Why, she's just wonderful. She's just my whole life, Tom."

"Excuse me. Forget it." Brackett chuckled uncomfortably, turned away. The naked intensity of the youth's burst of love had upset him. It made him wish savagely that he could do something for them. They were both too decent to have it so hard. Ella was like this boy too, shy and a little soft.

"Tom, listen," Jesse said, "I come here on purpose." He thrust his hand through his hair. "I want you to help me."

"Damn it, boy," Brackett groaned. He had been expecting this. "I can't much. I only get thirty-five a week and I'm damn grateful for it."

"Sure, I know," Jesse emphasized excitedly. He was feeling once again the wild, delicious agitation that had possessed him in the early hours of the morning. "I know you can't help us with money. But we met a man who works for you! He was in our city! He said you could give me a job!"

"Who said?"

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" Jesse burst out reproachfully. "Why as soon as I heard it I started out. For two weeks now I been pushing ahead¹³ like crazy."

Brackett groaned aloud. "You come walking from Kansas City in two weeks so I could give you a job?"

"Sure, Tom, of course. What else could I do?"

"God Almighty, there ain't no jobs, Jesse! It's a slack season. And you don't know this oil business. It's special. I got my friends here but they couldn't do nothing now. Don't you think I'd ask for you as soon as there was a chance?" Jesse felt stunned. The hope of the last two weeks seemed rolling up into a ball of agony in his stomach. Then, frantically, he cried, "But listen, this man said you could hire! He told me! He drives trucks for you! He said you always need men!"

"Oh! ... You mean my department?" Brackett said in a low voice.

"Yes, Tom. That's it!"

"Oh, no, you don't want to work in my department," Brackett told him in the same low voice. "You don't know what it is." "Yes, I do," Jesse insisted. "He told me all about it, Tom. You're a dispatcher, ain't you? You send the dynamite trucks out?"

"Who was the man, Jesse?"

"Everett, Everett, I think."

"Egbert? Man about my size?" Brackett asked slowly.

"Yes Egbert. He wasn't a phony, ¹⁴ was he?"

Brackett laughed. For the second time his laughter was curiously without mirth. "No, he wasn't a phony." Then, in a changed voice; "Jiminy, boy, you should have asked me before you trekked all the way down here."

"Oh, I didn't want to," Jesse explained with naive cunning. "I knew you'd say 'no'. He told me it was risky work, Tom. But I don't care."

Brackett locked his fingers together. His solid, meaty face became very hard. "I'm going to say 'no' anyway, Jesse."

Jesse cried out. It had not occurred to him that Brackett would not agree. It had seemed as though reaching Tulsa were the only problem he had to face. "Oh, no," he begged, "you can't. Ain't there, any jobs, Tom?"

"Sure, there's jobs. There's even Egbert's job if you want it."

"He's quit?"

"He's dead!"

"Oh!"

"On the job, Jesse. Last night if you want to know."

"Oh!" ... Then, "I don't care!"

"Now you listen to me!" Brackett said. "I'll tell you a few things that you should have asked before you started out. It ain't dynamite you drive. They don't use anything as safe as dynamite in drilling oil wells. They wish they could, but they can't. It's nitroglycerin! Soup!" ¹⁵

"But I know," Jesse told him reassuringly. "He advised me, Tom. You don't have to think I don't know."

"Shut up a minute," Brackett ordered angrily. "Listen! You just have to look at this soup, see? You just cough loud and it blows! You know how they transport it? In a can that's shaped like this, see, like a fan? That's to give room for compartments, because each compartment has to be lined with rubber. That's the only way you can even think of handling it."

"Listen, Tom - "

"Now, wait a minute, Jesse. For God's sake just put your mind to this.¹⁶ I know you had your heart set on a job, but you've got to understand. This stuff goes only in special trucks! At night! They got to follow a special route! They can't go through any city! If they lay over,¹⁷ it's got to be in a special garage! Don't you see what that means? Don't that tell you how dangerous it is?"

"I'll drive careful," Jesse said. "I know how to handle a truck. I'll drive slow."

Brackett groaned. "Do you think Egbert didn't drive careful or know how to handle a truck?"

"Tom," Jesse said earnestly, "You can't scare me. I got my mind fixed on only one thing. Egbert said he was getting a dollar a mile. He was making five to six hundred dollars a month for half a month's work, he said. Can I get the same?"

"Sure, you can get the same," Brackett told him savagely. "A dollar a mile. It's easy. But why do you think the company has to pay so much? It's easy - until you run over a stone that your headlights didn't pick out, like Egbert did. Or get a blowout! Or get something in your eye, so the wheel twists and you jar the truck! Or any other God damn thing that nobody ever knows! We can't ask Egbert what happened to him. There's no truck to give any evidence. There's no corpse. There's nothing! Maybe to-morrow somebody'll find a piece of twisted steel way off in a cornfield. But we never find the driver. Not

even a finger nail. All we know is that he don't come in on schedule. Then we wait for the police to call us. You know what happened last night? Something went wrong on the bridge. Maybe Egbert was nervous. Maybe he brushed the side with his fender. Only there's no bridge any more. No truck. No Egbert. Do you understand now? That's what you get for your God damn dollar a mile!"

There was a moment of silence. Jesse sat twisting his long thin hands. His mouth was sagging open, his face was agonized. Then he shut his eyes and spoke softly. "I don't care about that, Tom. You told me. Now you got to be good to me and give me the job."

Brackett slapped the palm of his hand down on his desk. "No!"

"Listen, Tom," Jesse said softly, "you just don't understand." He opened his eyes. They were filled with tears. They made Brackett turn away. "Just look at me, Tom. Don't that tell you enough? What did you think of me when you first saw me? You thought; 'Why don't that bum go away and stop panhandling!' Didn't you, Tom? Tom, I just can't live like this any more. I got to be able to walk down the street with my head up."

"You're crazy," Brackett muttered. "Every year there's one out of five drivers gets killed. That's the average. What's worth that?"

"Is my life worth anything now? We're just starving at home, Tom. They ain't put us back on relief yet."

"Then you should have told me," Brackett exclaimed harshly. "It's your own damn fault. A man has no right to have false pride when his family ain't eating. I'll borrow some money and we'll telegraph it to Ella. Then you go home and get back on relief."

"And then what?"

"And then wait, God damn it! You're no old man. You got no right to throw your life away. Sometime you'll get a job."

"No!" Jesse jumped up. "No, I believed that too. But I don't know," he cried passionately. "I ain't getting a job no more than you're getting your hardware store back. I lost my skill, Tom. Linotyping is skilled work. I'm rusty now. I've been six years on relief. The only work I've had is pick and shovel. When I got that job this spring I was supposed to be an A-1 man.¹⁸ But I wasn't. And they got new machines now. As soon as the slack started they let me out."

"So what?" Brackett said harshly. "Ain't there other jobs?"

"How do I know?" Jesse replied. "There ain't been one for six years. I'd even be afraid to take one now. It's been too hard waiting so many weeks to get back on relief."

"Well, you got some courage," Brackett shouted. "You've got to keep up hope."

"I got all the courage you want," Jesse retorted vehemently, "but no, I ain't got no hope. The hope has dried up in me in six years' waiting. You're the only hope I got."

"You're crazy," Brackett muttered. "I won't do it. For Got's sake think of Ella for a minute."

"Don't you know I'm thinking about her?" Jesse asked softly. He plucked at Brackett's sleeve. "That's what decided me, Tom." His voice became muted into a hushed pained whisper. "The night Egbert was at our house I looked at Ella like I'd seen her for the first time. She ain't pretty any more, Tom!" "Brackett jerked his head and moved away. Jesse followed him, taking a deep, sobbing breath. "Don't that tell you, Tom? Ella was like a little doll or something, you remember. I couldn't walk down the street without somebody turning to look at her. She ain't twenty-nine yet, Tom, and she ain't pretty no more."

Brackett sat down with his shoulders hunched up wear-

ly. He gripped his hands together and sat leaning forward, staring at the floor.

Jesse stood over him, his gaunt face flushed with emotion, almost unpleasant in its look of pleading and bitter humility. "I ain't done right for Ella, Tom. Ella deserved better. This is the only chance I see in my whole life to do something for her. I've just been a failure."

"Don't talk nonsense," Brackett commented, without rancor. "You ain't a failure? No more than me. There's millions of men in the identical situation. It's just the depression, or the recession, or the God damn New Deal,¹⁹ or ... !" He swore and lapsed into silence.

"Oh, no," Jesse corrected him, in a knowing, sorrowful tone, "those things maybe excuse other men. But not me. It was up to me to do better. This is my own fault!"

"Oh, beans!"²⁰ Brackett said. "It's more sun spots than it's you!"²¹

Jesse's face turned an unhealthy mottled red. It looked swollen. "Well, I don't care," he cried wildly. "I don't care! You got to give me this! I got to lift my head up. I went through one stretch of hell but I can't go through another. You want me to keep looking at my little boy's legs and tell myself if I had a job he wouldn't be like that? Every time he walks he says to me, 'I got soft bones from the rickets and you give it to me because you didn't feed me right.' Jesus Christ, Tom, you think I'm going to sit there and watch him like that another six years?"

Brackett leaped to his feet. "So what if you do?" he shouted. "You say you're thinking about Ella. How's she going to like it when you get killed?"

"Maybe, I won't," Jesse pleaded. "I've got to have some luck sometime."

"That's what they all think," Brackett replied scornfully. "When you take this job your luck is a question

mark. The only thing certain is that sooner or later you get killed."

"Okay then," Jesse shouted back. "Then I do! But meanwhile I get something, don't I? I can buy a pair of shoes. Look at me! I can buy a suit that don't say 'Relief' by the way it fits. I can smoke cigarettes. I can buy some candy for the kids. I can eat some myself. Yes, by God, I want to eat some candy. I want a glass of beer once a day. I want Ella dressed up. I want her to eat meat three times a week, four times maybe. I want to take my family to the movies."

Brackett sat down. "Oh shut up," he said wearily.

"No," Jesse told him softly, passionately, "you can't get rid of me. Listen, Tom," he pleaded, "I got it all figured out. On six hundred a month look how much I can save! If I last only three months, look how much it is - a thousand dollars - more! And maybe I'll last longer. Maybe a couple years, I can fix Ella up for life!"

"You said it," Brackett interposed, "I suppose you think she'll enjoy living when you're on a job like that?"

"I got it all figured out," Jesse answered excitedly. "She don't know, see? I tell her I make only forty. You put the rest in a bank account for her, Tom."

"Oh, shut up", Brackett said. "You think you'll be happy? Every minute, waking and sleeping, you'll be wondering if tomorrow you'll be dead. And the worst days will be your days off, when you're not driving. They have to give you every other day free to get your nerve back. And you lay around the house eating your heart out. That's how happy you'll be."

Jesse laughed. "I'll be happy! Don't you worry. I'll be so happy, I'll be singing. Lord God, Tom, I'm going to feel proud of myself for the first time in seven years!"

"Oh, shut up, shut up," Brackett said.

The little shanty became silent. After a moment

Jesse whispered: "You got to, Tom. You got to. You got to."

Again there was silence. Brackett raised both hands to his head, pressing the palms against his temples.

"Tom, Tom - " Jesse said.

Brackett sighed. "Oh God damn it," he said finally. "all right, I'll take you on, God help me." His voice was low, hoarse, infinitely weary. "If you're ready to drive tonight, you can drive tonight."

Jesse didn't answer. He couldn't. Brackett looked up. The tears were running down Jesse's face. He was swallowing and trying to speak, but only making an absurd, gasping noise.

"I'll send a wire to Ella," Brackett said in the same hoarse, weary voice. "I'll tell her you got a job, and you'll send her fare in a couple of days. You'll have some money then- that is, if you last the week out, you jackass."

Jesse only nodded. His heart felt so close to bursting that he pressed both hands against it, as though to hold it locked within his breast.

"Come back here at six o'clock," Brackett said.

"Here's some money. Eat a good meal."

"Thanks," Jesse whispered.

"Wait a minute," Brackett said. "Here's my address." He wrote it on a piece of paper. "Take any car going that way. Ask the conductor where to get off. Take a bath and get some sleep!"

"Thanks," Jesse said. "Thanks, Tom."

"Oh, get out of here," Brackett said.

"Tom."

"What?"

"I just- " Jesse stopped. Brackett saw his face. The eyes were still glistening with tears, but the gaunt face was shining now, with a kind of fierce radiance.

Brackett turned away. "I'm busy," he said.

Jesse went out. The wet film blinded him but the whole world seemed to have turned golden. He limped slowly,

with the blood pounding at his temples and a wild, incommunicable joy in his heart. "I'm the happiest man in the world", he whispered to himself. "I'm the happiest man on the whole earth."

Brackett sat watching till finally Jesse turned the corner of the alley and disappeared. Then he hunched himself over, with his head in his hands. His heart was beating painfully, like something old and clogged. He listened to it as it beat. He sat in desperate tranquillity, gripping his head in his hands.

* * * * *

Proper Names

Egbert	/'egʔə:t/
Ella	/'elə/
Jesse	/'dʒesi/
Kansas City	/'kænzəs 'siti/
Missouri	/mi'zuəri/
Oklahoma	/ouklə'houma /
Tulsa	/'tʌlsə/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... Kansas City - a large city on the Missouri River
2. ... Missouri - a central state in the USA.
3. Tulsa - a town in the state of Oklahoma
4. Oklahoma - one of the southern states in the USA.
5. ... ain't - the uneducated form for "is not, are not, am not, have not, has not ,,"
6. ... don't everybody (uneducated speech) - does not (doesn't) everybody ... Other examples from the text: Don't that tell you ...; Why don't that bum go away.

7. "I ain't no corpse" (double negative occurs in uneducated speech). - I am no corpse. Other examples from the text: They couldn't do nothing now; ... She ain't pretty no more ...
8. You was solid looking - you were solid looking (disagreement between the subject and predicate which occurs in uneducated speech). Another example from the text: there's jobs - there are jobs.
9. "Viminy Christmas" (exclamation) - Good heavens!
10. ... you looked so peaked - you looked so thin (sharp - featured).
11. ... the Relief - a state organization in the U.S.A. to help unemployed workers.
12. "... has to wear a brace" - ... has to wear a kind of doctor - prescribed corset to support his rickety body.
13. "... I been pushing ahead - ... I have been pushing ahead (ungrammatical). A similar example from the text: They got to follow a special route - They have got to follow a special route.
14. "... a phony - a deceiver, a fraud (a person who is fond of lying) - in American slang.
15. ... nitroglycerin - a highly explosive substance. soup! - the same in slang.
16. ... put your mind to this ... try to understand this (be sensible)
17. If they lay over - If they load or unload.
18. "... an A-1 man" - a first-rate worker.
19. ... New Deal - the new economic policy (reforms) in the U.S.A. introduced by President Fr. Roosevelt in the 30ies.

20. ... O, beans! - Nonsense! (slang).

21. "It's more sun spots than it's you!" - It is not
your fault (you are not to blame).

THE SURPRISE OF MR. MILBERRY

Jerome K. Jerome

1859 - 1924

"It's not the sort of thing to tell 'em," remarked Henry, as, with his napkin over his arm, he leant against one of the pillars of the verandah, and sipped the glass of Burgundy¹ I had poured out for him; "and they wouldn't believe it if you did tell 'em, not one of 'em. But it's the truth, for all that. Without the clothes they couldn't do it".

"Who wouldn't believe what?" I asked. He had a curious habit, had Henry, of commenting aloud upon his own unspoken thoughts thereby bestowing upon his conversation much of the quality of the double acrostic.² We had been discussing the question whether sardines served their purpose better as a hors d'oeuvre or as a savoury; and I found myself wondering for the moment why sardines, above all other fish, should be of an unbelieving nature; while endeavouring to picture to myself the costume best adapted to display the somewhat difficult figure of a sardine. Henry put down his glass, and came to my rescue with the necessary explanation.

"Why, women - that they can tell one baby from another without its clothes. I've got a sister, a monthly nurse, and she will tell you for a fact, if you care to ask her, that up to three months of age there isn't really any difference between 'em. You can tell a girl from a boy and a Christian child from a black heathen, perhaps; but to fancy you can put your finger on an unclothed infant and say; "That's a Smith, or that's a Jones, 'as the case may be - why, it's sheer nonsense. Take the things off 'em, and shake them up in a blanket, and I'll bet you what you like that which is which you'd never be able to tell again so long as you lived."

I agreed with Henry, so far as my own personal powers of discrimination might be concerned, but I suggested that to Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Smith there would surely occur some means of identification.

"So they'd tell you themselves, no doubt," replied Henry; "and of course, I am not thinking of cases where the child might have a mole or a squint, as might come in useful. But take 'em in general, kids are as much alike as sardines of the same age would be. Anyhow, I knew a case where a fool of a young nurse mixed up two children at a hotel and to this day neither of those women is sure that she's got her own".

"Do you mean", I said, "there was no possible means of distinguishing?"

"There wasn't a flea-bite to go by", answered Henry. "They had the same bumps, the same pimples, the same scratches; they were the same age to within three days; they weighed the same to an ounce; and they measured the same to an inch. One father was tall and fair; and the other was short and dark. The tall, fair man had a dark, short wife; and the short, dark man had married a tall, fair woman. For a week they changed those kids to and fro a dozen times a day, and cried and quarreled over them. Each woman felt sure she was the mother of the one that was crowing at the moment, and when it yelled she was positive it was no child of hers. They thought they would trust to the instinct of the children. Neither child, so long as it wasn't hungry, appeared to care a curse for anybody; and when it was hungry it always wanted the mother that the other kid had got. They decided, in the end, to leave it to time. It's three years ago now, and possibly enough some likeness to the parents will develop that will settle the question. All I say is, up to three months old you can't tell 'em, I don't care who says you can."

He paused, and appeared to be absorbed in contemplation of the distant Matterhorn,³ then clad in its rosy robe

of evening. There was a vein of poetry in Henry, not uncommon among cooks and waiters. The perpetual atmosphere of hot food I am inclined to think is favourable to the growth of the softer emotions. One of the most sentimental men I ever knew kept a ham-and-beef shop just off the Far-rington Road. In the early morning he could be shrewd and business-like, but when hovering with a knife and fork above the mingled steam of bubbling sausages and hissing peas-pudding, any whimpering tramp with any impossible tale of woe could impose upon him easily.

"But the rummiest go⁴ I ever recollect in connection with a baby," continued Henry after a while, his gaze still fixed upon the distant snow-crowned peaks, "happened to me at Warwick⁵ in the Jubilee year.⁶ I'll never forget that."

"Is it a proper story," I asked, "a story fit for me to hear?"

On consideration, Henry saw no harm in it, and told it to me accordingly.

He came by the 'bus that meets the 4.52.⁷ He'd a hand-bag and a sort of hamper it looked to me like a linen-basket. He wouldn't let the Boots⁸ touch the hamper, but carried it up into his bedroom himself. He carried it in front of him by the handles, and grazed his knuckles at every second step. He slipped going round the bend of the stairs, and knocked his head a rattling good thump against the balustrade; but he never let go that hamper - only swore and plunged on. I could see he was nervous and excited, but one gets used to nervous and excited people in hotels. Whether a man's running away from a thing, or running after a thing, he stops at a hotel on his way, and so long as he looks as if he could pay his bill one doesn't trouble much about him. But this man interested me: he was so uncommonly young and innocentlooking. Besides, it was a dull hole of a place after the sort of jobs I'd been used to; and when you've been doing nothing for three months but waiting on commercial gents⁹ as are having an exceptionally

bad season, and spoony couples with guidebooks, you get a bit depressed, and welcome any incident, however slight, that promises to be out of the common.

I followed him up into his room, and asked him if I could do anything for him. He flopped the hamper on the bed with a sigh of relief, took off his hat, wiped his head with his handkerchief, and then turned to answer me.

"Are you a married man?" says he.

It was an odd question to put to a waiter, but coming from a gent there was nothing to be alarmed about.

"Well, not exactly," I says¹⁰ - I was only engaged at that time, and that not to my wife, if you understand what I mean - "but I know a good deal about it, "I says, "and if it is a matter of advice - -

"It isn't that", he answers, interrupting me; "but I don't want you to laugh at me. I thought if you were a married man you would be able to understand the thing better. Have you got an intelligent woman in the house?"

"We've got women", I says, "As to their intelligence, that's a matter of opinion; they're the average sort of women. Shall I call the chambermaid?"

"Ah, do!" he says. "Wait a minute", he says; "we'll open it first."

He began to fumble with the cord, then he suddenly lets go and begins to chuckle to himself.

"No," he says, "you open it. Open it carefully; it will surprise you."

I don't take much stock¹¹ in surprises myself. My experience is that they're mostly unpleasant.

"What's in it?" I says

"You'll see if you open it," he says: "it won't hurt you."

And off he goes again, chuckling to himself.

"Well," I says to myself, "I hope you're a harmless specimen." Then an idea struck me, and I stopped with the knot in my fingers.

"It ain't a corpse,"¹² I says, "is it?"

He turned as white as the sheet on the bed, and clutched the mantlepiece. "Good God! don't suggest such a thing," he says; "I never thought of that. Open it quickly."

"I'd rather you came and opened it yourself, sir," I says. I was beginning not to half like the business.

"I can't," he says, "after that suggestion of yours - you've put me all in a tremble. Open it quick, man; tell me it's all right."

Well, my own curiosity helped me. I cut the cord, threw open the lid, and looked in. He kept his eyes turned away, as if he were frightened to look for himself.

"Is it all right?" he says. "Is it alive?"

"It's about as alive," I says, "as anybody'll ever want it to be, I should say."

"Is it breathing all right?" he says.

"If you can't hear it breathing," I says, "I'm afraid you're deaf."

"You might have heard its breathing outside in the street. He listened, and even he was satisfied.

"Thank Heaven!" he says, and down he plumped in the easy-chair by the fireplace. "You know, I never thought of that," he goes on. "He's been shut up in that basket for over an hour, and if by any chance he'd managed to get his head entangled in the clothes - - I'll never do such a fool's trick again!"

"You're fond of it?" I says.

He looke round at me. "Fond of it," he repeats.

"Why, I'm his father." And then he begins to laugh again.

"Oh!" I says. "Then I presume I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Coster King?"

"Coster King?" he answers in surprise. "My name's Milberry."

I says: "The father of this child, according to the label inside the cover, is Coster King out of Starlight,¹³ his mother being Jenny Deans out of Darby the Devil."

He looks at me in a nervous fashion, and puts the chair between us. It was evidently his turn to think as how I was mad. Satisfying himself, I suppose, that at all events I wasn't dangerous, he crept closer till he could get a look inside the basket. I never heard a man give such an unearthly yell in all my life. He stood on one side of the bed and I on the other. The dog, awakened by the noise, sat up and grinned, first at one of us and then at the other. I took it to be a bull-pup¹⁴ of about nine months old, and a fine specimen for its age.

"My child!" he shrieks, with his eyes starting out of his head. "That thing isn't my child. What's happened? Am I going mad?"

"You're on that way," I says, and so he was.

"Calm yourself," I says; "what did you expect to see?"

"My child," he shrieks again; "My only child - my baby!"

"Do you mean a real child?" I says, "a human child?" Some folks have such a silly way of talking about their dogs - you never can tell.

"Of course I do," he says; "the prettiest child you ever saw in all your life, just thirteen weeks old on Sunday. He cut his first tooth yesterday."

The sight of the dog's face seemed to madden him. He flung himself upon the basket, and would, I believe, have strangled the poor beast if I hadn't interposed between them.

"'Tain't the dog's fault,"¹⁵ I says; "I daresay he's as sick about the whole business as you are. He's lost, too. Somebody's been having a lark with you. They've took¹⁶ your baby out and put this in - that is, if there ever was a baby there."

"What do you mean?" he says.

"Well, sir," I says, "if you'll excuse me, gentlemen in their sober senses don't take their babies about in dog-baskets. Where do you come from?"

"From Banbury," he says; "I'm well known in Banbury".

"I can quite believe it," I says; "you're the sort of young man that would be known anywhere."

"I'm Mr. Milberry," he says, "the grocer, in the High Street."

"Then what are you doing here with this dog?" I says.

"Don't irritate me," he answers, "I tell you I don't know myself. My wife's stopping here at Warwick, nursing her mother, and in every letter she's written home for the last fortnight she's said, "Oh, how I do long to see Eric! If only I could see Eric for a moment!"

"A very motherly sentiment," I says, "which does her credit."

"So this afternoon," continues he, "it being early-closing day, I thought I'd bring the child^{here}, so that she might see it, and see that it was all right. She can't leave her mother for more than about an hour, and I can't go up to the house, because the old lady doesn't like me, and I excite her. I was to wait here, and Milly - that's my wife - was to come to me when she could get away. I meant this to be a surprise to her."

"And I guess," I says, "it will be the biggest one you have ever given her."

"Don't try to be funny about it," he says; "I'm not altogether myself, and I may do you an injury."

He was right. It wasn't a subject for joking, though it had its humorous side.

"But why," I says, "put it in a dog-basket?"

"It isn't a dog-basket," he answers irritably, "it's a picnic hamper. At the last moment I found I hadn't got the face¹⁷ to carry the child in my arms; I thought of what the street-boys would call out after me. He's a rare one to sleep, and I thought if I made him comfortable in that he couldn't hurt, just for so short a journey. I took it in the carriage with me, and carried it on my knees; I haven't let it out of my hands a blessed moment. It's

witchcraft, that's what it is. I shall believe in the devil after this."

"Don't be ridiculous," I says, "there's some explanation; it only wants finding. You are sure this is the identical hamper you packed the child in?"

He was calmer now. He leant over and examined it carefully. "It looks like it," he says; "but I can't swear to it."

"You tell me," I says, "you never let it go out of your hands. Now think."

"No," he says, "it's been on my knees all the time."

"But that's nonsense," I says; "unless you packed the dog yourself in mistake for your baby. Now think it over quietly. I'm not your wife. I'm only trying to help you. I shan't say anything even if you did take your eyes off the thing for a minute."

He thought again, and a light broke over his face. "By Jove!" he says, "you're right. I did put it down for a moment on the platform at Banbury while I bought a 'Tit-Bits'.¹⁸

"There you are," I says; "now you're talking sense. And wait a minute; isn't to-morrow the first day of the Birmingham Dog Show?"

"I believe you're right," he says.

"Now we're getting warm,"¹⁹ I says, "By a coincidence this dog was being taken to Birmingham,²⁰ packed in a hamper exactly similar to the one you put your baby in. You've got this man's bull-pup, he's got your baby; and I wouldn't like to say offhand at this moment which of you's feeling the madder. As likely as not,²¹ he thinks you've done it on purpose."

He leant his head against the bed-post and groaned. "Milly may be here at any moment," says he, "and I'll have to tell her the baby's been sent by mistake to a Dog Show! I daresn't do it,"²² he says, "I daresn't do it."

"Go on to Birmingham," I says, "and try and find it."

You can catch the quarter to six²³ and be back here before eight."

"Come with me," he says; "you're a good man, come, with me. I ain't fit to go by myself."

He was right: he'd have got run over outside the door, the state he was in then.

"Well," I says "if the guv'nor don't object²⁴ - - "

"Oh! he won't, he can't," cries the young fellow, wringing his hands. "Tell him it's a matter of a life's happiness. Tell him - - "

"I'll tell him it's a matter of half a sovereign extra onto the bill." I says. "That'll more likely do the trick."

And so it did, with the result that in another twenty minutes me and young Milberry and the bull-pup in its hamper were in a third-class carriage on our way to Birmingham. Then the difficulties of the chase began to occur to me. Suppose by luck I was right; suppose the pup was booked for the Birmingham Dog Show; and suppose by a bit more luck a gent with a hamper answering description had been noticed getting out of the 5.13 train; then where were we? We might have to interview every cabman in the town. As likely as not, by the time we did find the kid, it wouldn't be worth the trouble of unpacking. Still, it wasn't my cue to blab my thoughts.²⁵ The father, poor fellow, was feeling, I take it, just about as bad as he wanted to feel. My business was to put hope into him; so when he asked me for about the twentieth time if I thought as he would ever see his child alive again, I snapped him up shortish.²⁶

"Don't you fret yourself about that," I says.

"You'll see a good deal of that child before you've done with it. Babies ain't the sort of things as gets lost easily. It's only on the stage that folks ever have any particular use for other people's children. I've known some bad characters in my time, but I'd have trusted the

worst of 'em with a waggonload of other people's kids. Don't you flatter yourself you're going to lose it! Whoever's got it, you take it from me, his idea is to do the honest thing, and never rest till he's succeeded in returning it to the rightful owner."

Well, my talking like that cheered him, and when we reached Birmingham he was easier. We tackled the station-master, and he tackled all the porters who could have been about the platform when the 5.13 came in. All of 'em agreed that no gent got out of that train carrying a hamper. The station-master was a family man himself, and when we explained the case to him he sympathized and telegraphed to Banbury. The booking-clerk at Banbury remembered only three gents booking by that particular train. One had been Mr. Jessop, the corn-chandler; the second was a stranger, who had booked to Wolverhampton;²⁷ and the third had been young Milberry himself. The business began to look hopeless, when one of Smith's newsboys, who was hanging around, struck in:

"I see an old lady,"²⁸ says he, "hovering about outside the station, and a-hailing cabs, and she had a hamper with her as was like that one there as two peas."

I thought young Milberry would have fallen upon the boy's neck and kissed him. With the boy to help us, we started among the cabmen. Old ladies with dog-baskets ain't so difficult to trace. She had gone to a small second-rate hotel in the Aston Road. I heard all particulars from the chambermaid, and the old girl seems to have had as bad a time in her way as my gent in his. They couldn't get the hamper into the cab, it had to go on the top. The old lady was very worried, as it was raining at the time, and she made the cabman cover it with his apron. Getting it off the cab they dropped the whole thing in the road; that woke the child up, and it began to cry.

"Good Lord, ma'am! what is it?" asks the chambermaid, "a baby?"

"Yes, my dear, it's my baby," answers the old lady, who seems to have been a cheerful sort of old soul - leastways²⁹, she was cheerful up to then. "Poor dear, I hope they haven't hurt him."

The old lady had ordered a room with a fire in it. The Boots took the hamper up, and laid it on the hearth-rug. The old lady said she and the chambermaid would see to it, and turned him out. By this time, according to the girl's account, it was roaring like a steam-siren.

"Pretty dear!" says the old lady, fumbling with the cord, "don't cry; mother's opening it as fast as she can." Then she turns to the chambermaid - "if you open my bag," says she, "you will find a bottle of milk and some dog-biscuits."

"Dog-biscuits!" says the chambermaid.

"Yes," says the old lady, laughing, "my baby loves dog-biscuits."

The girl opened the bag, and there, sure enough, was a bottle of milk and half a dozen Spratt's biscuits. She had her back to the old lady, when she heard a sort of a groan and a thud as made her turn round. The old lady was lying stretched dead on the hearthrug - so the chambermaid thought. The kid was sitting up in the hamper yelling the roof off. In her excitement, not knowing what she was doing, she handed it a biscuit, which it snatched at greedily and began sucking. Then she set to work to slap the old lady back to life³⁰ again. In about a minute the poor old soul opened her eyes and looked round. The baby was quiet now, gnawing the dog-biscuit. The old lady looked at the child, then turned and hid her face against the chambermaid's bosom.

"What is it?" she says, speaking in an awed voice.

"The thing in the hamper?"

"It's a baby, ma'am," says the maid.

"You're sure it ain't a dog?" says the old lady.

"Look again."

The girl began to feel nervous, and to wish that she wasn't alone with the old lady.

"I ain't likely to mistake a dog for a baby, ma'am," says the girl. "It's a child - a human infant."

The old lady began to cry softly. "It's a judgment on me," she says. "I used to talk to that dog as if it had been a Christian, and now this thing has happened as a punishment."

"What's happened?" says the chambermaid, who was naturally enough growing more and more curious.

"I don't know," says the old lady, sitting up on the floor. "If this isn't a dream, and if I ain't mad, I started from my home at Farthinghoe, two hours ago, with a one-year-old bulldog packed in that hamper. You saw me open it, you see what's inside it now."

"But bulldogs," says the chambermaid, "ain't changed into babies by magic."

"I don't know how it's done," says the old lady, "and I don't see that it matters, I know I started with a bulldog, and somehow or other it's got turned into that."

"Somebody's put it there," says the chambermaid; "somebody as wanted to get rid of a child. They've took your dog out and put that in its place."

"They must have been precious smart," says the old lady; "the hamper hasn't been out of my sight for more than five minutes, when I went into the refreshment-room at Banbury for a cup of tea."

"That's when they did it," says the chambermaid, "and a clever trick it was."

The old lady suddenly grasped her position, and jumped up from the floor. "And a nice thing for me," she says. "An unmarried woman in a scandal-mongering village!" This is awful!"

"It's a fine-looking child," says the chambermaid.

"Would you like it?" says the old lady.

The chambermaid said she wouldn't. The old lady sat

down and tried to think, and the more she thought the worse she felt. The chambermaid was positive that if we hadn't come when we did the poor creature would have gone mad. When the Boots appeared at the door to say there was a gent and a bulldog downstairs enquiring after a baby, she flung her arms round the man's neck and hugged him.

We just caught the train to Warwick, and by luck got back to the hotel ten minutes before the mother turned up. Young Milberry carried the child in his arms all the way. He said I could have the hamper for myself, and gave me half-a-sovereign extra on the understanding that I kept my mouth shut, which I did.

I don't think he ever told the child's mother what had happened - leastways, if he wasn't a fool right through, he didn't.

* * * * *

Proper Names

1. Aston Road	/ 'æstən 'roud/
2. Banbury	/ 'bænbəri/
3. Birmingham	/ 'bæ:miŋə m/
4. Burgundy	/ 'bə:gəndi/
5. Coster King	/ 'kɒstə'kiŋ/
6. Darby (the Devel)	/ 'dɑ:bɪ/
7. Eric	/ 'erik/
8. Farringdon Road	/ 'fæ riŋ dən 'roud/
9. Farthingoe	/ 'fa:ð iŋg ou/
10. Henry	/ 'henri/
11. Jenny Deans	/ 'dʒ eni 'di:nz/
12. Jessop	/ 'dʒ esəp/
13. Jones	/ 'dʒ ounz/
14. Matterhorn	/ 'mætəhɔ:n/
15. Smith	/ smi θ /
16. Warwick	/ 'wɜ:rik/
17. Wolverhampton	/ 'wulvə hæmptən/

Explanatory Notes

1. ... the glass of **Burgundy** - the glass of a certain red wine
2. ... double acrostic - a verse where both the first and the last letters of each line read from top to bottom form a word or name.
3. ... **Matterhorn** - a mountain in the Alps
4. ... **rummiest** go (coll.) - the queerest incident
5. **Warwick** - a town in central England
6. ... the Jubilee year - the Jubilee of 50 years of Queen Victoria's reign
7. ... that meets the 4.52 - that meets the 4.52 train
8. **Boots** - a hotel servant who cleans boots, conveys luggage, etc.
9. ... commercial gents - commercial travellers
10. ... I says (ungrammatical) - I say
11. I don't take much stock in surprises - I don't think highly of surprises
12. "It ain't a corpse" (see p. 101) - It is not a corpse
13. **Coster King** out of **Starlight** - a reference to the names of dogs (Coster King born of Starlight)
14. ... a bull-pup - a bulldog puppy
15. "Tain't the dog's fault" (contracted form in ungrammatical language) - It isn't the dog's fault
16. "They've took ..." (ungrammatical) - They have taken
17. ... hadn't got the face - hadn't got the courage
18. **Tit-Bits** - a kind of biscuits

19. "Now we're getting warm" - Now we are getting
closer to the truth
20. Birmingham - a large manufacturing town in central
England.
21. ... as likely as not - very likely
22. I daresn't do it - I dare not do it
23. You can catch the quarter to six - You can catch
the quarter-to-six train
24. ... if the guv'nor don't object - if the governor
doesn't object
25. ... it wasn't my cue to blab my thoughts - I wasn't
there to express my thoughts
26. I snapped him up shortish - I interrupted him curtly
27. Wolverhampton - a city in central England
28. I see an old lady - I saw an old lady
29. ... leastways (dial.) - at least
30. ... to slap the old lady back to life - she slapped
the old lady's face hoping that it would help
her to regain consciousness

ЧТЕНИЕ ИЗ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ
И АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

На английском языке

Составитель Х. Пулк

Тартуский государственный университет
ЭССР, г.Тарту, ул. Ёликооли, 18

Vastutav toimetaja A. Kriit

=====

TRÜ rotaprint 1969. Paljundamisele antud 20. XI 1969.
Trükipoognaid 7,38. Tingtrükipoognaid 6,86. Arvestus-
poognaid 5,05. Trükiarv 1000. Faber 30x42. 1/4.
MB 09781. Tell. nr. 900.

Hind 25 kop.